

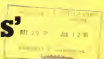
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May 1981 \$1.95*

Theatre Australia

AUSTRALIAN PLAYWRIGHTS' ISSUE

The top 30 Playwrights
The politics of writing
A new era





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A Musical Vaudeville



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VOLUME 5, No. 3

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a play by DOREEN CLARKE

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COMMENT



BY
ROBERT
PAGE

The Playwrights' Conference

The sixth Australian National Playwrights' Conference began its annual two-week meet on April 26. Held now for six consecutive years at Canberra's ANU (and this being the second it has made use of the excellent facilities of the new Arts Centre) the Conference has become something of an institution in that city as well as on the national theatrical map.

The ANPC was conceived in 1972 by a small band of people convinced that to flourish, budding Australian playwrights needed a strong ground for new work, an introduction to the theatrical process and a time and place to meet such people as Katherine Brisbane, Philip Parsons, Jacqueline Kott, Amy McGrath, Brian Byrnes and Dorothy Hewett committed to the inaugural committee and the first Conference was held in Canberra in 1973, in conditions of comparative luxury — the budget was \$30,000. It was based very much on the American O'Neill Center's Playwrights' Conference and has since developed in ways more suited to this country's theatrical, geographic and other terms.

In spite of the success of the first conference, finance with which to run subsequent years became increasingly hard to find over the next few years. The marvellous Western Arts Council and the struggling ANPC seemed to many funding bodies a suitable low dog to snuff from the subsidy lists. The 1978 Playwrights' Conference was threatened with complete extinction, but managed to survive the Theatre Board decision of no funding, and became a turning point in the development of the organisation. Bob Adams and Brian Sweeney of the Theatre Board spent some time in Canberra, participated in the activities and debate and saw for themselves the enormous value of the developing Theatre Forum element and the support of the attending professionals for the workshoping and discussion processes.

From that time the Playwrights' Conference has gone from strength to strength and this year's is one of expanded activity. Artistic Director, Graeme Blundell, and Chairman of the Playreading Committee,

Ron Blair, have chosen seven plays to be given full workshop treatment and a further ten to have restricted readings.

Of the workshop plays, five of the seven are by known writers: Alma de Groen (*Parsons*), Richard Forthright (*Mill and Her*), Clem Gorman (*A Night In The Arms of Babylon*), Bob Herbert (*Sex and Politics*) and Dorothy Hewett (*Zemora*), and only two by new writers. The *Storylines of Robinson* by Kate Rowland and *Death of Hoff* by Frank McKee.

This weighing looks like a major change in direction for a conference that was established primarily to foster new playwrights. It can be seen, though, as a circular movement and one that is in some ways overdue. Many writers who were "new" some nine years ago have since become "established", in varying degrees, but still find difficulties in finding outlets for their work, particularly that which takes a new direction or could be regarded as "experimental". With the development of dramaturges over the last decade the aims of the ANPC can be seen as have matured and regrouped and its responsibilities to have extended to make available workshop facilities for acknowledged writers. It should also be argued that of the six or so new writers whose scripts have been workshoped at each previous Conference, rarely have more than two in any one year gone on to further significant work. Blundell and Blair have this year chosen what they believe to be the "best" of the submitted scripts, rather than those "most suitable for workshop" — the criterion of former years.

On the other hand, the retired playwrights who had submitted scripts to the ANPC may feel that established writers are unfairly encroaching on their very limited intimacy, that the known names will at least get a hearing from theatre companies while the Playwrights' Conference represents to them almost the only chance to see their work in performance, to make contact with the theatre world or to be in any way acknowledged. However unorthodox, the showcase aspect of final readings in Canberra, in instances of discussion, agents and entrepreneurs, is highly desirable for a playwright as whatever stage of her life comes.

Perhaps in an effort to address the balance against established writers, this year's ANPC has swung too far in their favour. In the future it may be necessary to allocate a certain proportion of slots to new and a certain proportion to known writers. A straightforward choice of the

Continued on Page 64

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I N F O

HAPPY TENTH TO CURRENCY

It was hard to work out who wasn't there to say "Happy 10th Birthday" to Currency Press Publishers on 31 March. A huge crowd of writers, directors, actors, critics and readers gathered happily while a fearful Philip Parsons explained how he and fellow-editor Katherine Brisbane had fought against cynicism and financial odds to convince Australians that they could read performable plays.

Barry Humphries in his newly-defined role as Australian dramatist, officially launched Currency's latest *chief d'oeuvre* — Peter Hollaway's edition of *Contemporary Australian Drama Perspectives since 1913* and commissioned. Just as the Currency Co-Op Bookshop's important Bay Street store where the launching was held had once been Grace Bros stock department, so the Australian Theatre had changed from the days when he was a young lad in the Union Rep. And a good thing too, everybody wanted to say.

Helen Mann

GORDON CHATER RETURNS

Gordon Chater will be returning to our stages in a joint (Helen Montague, Wilson Morley, MLC Theatre Royal, Paul Diney and AETTC) commercial production of Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser* — the play which won last year's *Evening Standard* Drama Critics Award for Best Play. The production will star Warren Mitchell as the dresser, Gordon Chater as Sir, the actor and Ruth Cracknell as Her Ladyship. Director will be Rodney Fisher and the play will open at the Theatre Royal, Sydney on May 22.

The Dresser was inspired by the life and times of the late actor-manager Sir Donald Wolfit and his Shakespearean company which toured the English repertory theatre circuit during World War Two. Playwright Harwood was Wolfit's dresser for almost five years and he has also written the actor's biography.

In the June 1980 issue of *TA*, Irving Wardle said of the play "Among other things *The Dresser* is just the kind of melodramatic suspense story in which the old actors exelled. It also accommodates quantities of backstage lore, superstitions, actors' jokes ("What — fifty of my followers with the clap?") and the routine tensions of getting a show on."

After a six week Sydney season *The*



Barry Humphries

Dresser will go on to the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne on July 7.

It will certainly be a pleasure to see Mr Chater back in Australia, and hopefully this production will have the sort of success that might persuade him to stay.



Gordon Chater

NO MORE FOR OPERA

The Commonwealth Government has now definitely stated that it will not be providing any additional funds for the opera companies, as was proposed in the Opera and Music Theatre on Australia Report (commissioned by the Australia Council). It will maintain its funding of the Australian Opera, though, as a single line item of expenditure in the Federal Budget.

It will also continue to support the orchestras in the hands of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, rather than ally them to the Opera and Ballet, as the Report proposed.

Australia Council Chairman, professor Geoffrey Blainey was disappointed in the Federal Government's decision, but said the Report was still valid as a reference and guide book. Unfortunately not one that the Government saw fit to be guided by.

The Victoria State Opera is making clear its independence from the Australian Opera in any case. The two companies'



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combined marketing of opera seasons will not continue beyond the current 1981 season. VSO Chairman, Jeffrey Shaw QC, said "The Victoria State Opera believes humanitas lies in developing its independent character and status and in providing opportunity for employment to Victorians in a musical vocation."

"The Victoria State Opera Board recognises the need to provide alternative and more diverse forms of music theatre, including operetta, musical comedy and Australian opera in the new Victorian Arts Centre, the Myer Music Bowl and in Victorian country areas."

The VSO is already operating a special discount scheme to most secondary students during the Company's 1981 season.

JUDY DAVIS FOR LULU

It certainly won't have done any harm to the State Theatre Company of SA's production of *Lulu* that Judy Davis won two BAFTA Awards for Best Actress and Best Newcomer, though Jim Sharman had picked her as his lead long before she had even been nominated. The production will be touring to the Sydney Theatre Company after its Adelaide season and will be at the Drama Theatre from July 21.

Louis Nowra has written the adaptation of *Lulu* by Frank Wedekind, the play is made up of two parts, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, subtitled "Scenes of Sex, Murder and Power".



Judy Davis

Apart from Judy, it will be a star-studded production, with Kerry Walker, Brigid Barker, Ivar Kants, Malcolm Robertson and Ralph Cotterell in the cast. Sharman has once again put together the *Grigging* team that has been so successful in the past — notably with his *Death in Venice* at the last Adelaide

Festival — of Brian Thomson, designing the sets, and Luciana Angeli as costumes.

Lulu is a play that has shocked audiences since its first performance in 1895. One of the most remarkable creations in dramatic literature, *Lulu* ("a beautiful and graceful female animal") is a woman whose sexual drives destroy the males she comes into contact with and in the end results in her own destruction.

MTC FEEDBACK

In the March edition of *Theatre Australia* Page 3 "Comment", you make a statement about the MTC which is outrageous in rather the implication given. I feel, the wrong impression. You talk about financial tightropes, and then you mention that the MTC had an injection of over \$1 million from the Victorian Government in 1977.

The fact is that we persuaded the Victorian Government to give us \$1 million to buy a building. That was the beginning and end of the matter. We weren't on any financial tightrope at the time and we could have continued in the old premises, but we took the opportunity to better ourselves by persuading the Government to do something for us as a tribute to the Arts Centre.

I do think you ought to have this information because in fact, some people have tried to use as a result of your article that they hear that the Government had to bail us out of financial difficulties to the tune of \$1 million. That is absolutely untrue.

John Sumner,
Director,
Melbourne Theatre Company

MANIPULATING REALITY

"Manipulating Reality: The Mask and the Puppet as Theatre" (National Gallery of Victoria, March 3-April 199) was an exhibition organised by the Performing Arts Museum of Victoria in conjunction with the Education Services section of the Gallery. The Exhibition Co-ordinator, Anna Sandler, had the daunting task of collecting the contents of 258 masks and puppets. These were supplemented by loans from the Gallery's collection to make a total of 100 masks and nearly 200 puppets.

The exhibition encompassed an extraordinary diversity of cultures, materials, styles and uses of puppets and masks, giving a whistle-stop history of the art in Europe and Asia and an historical perspective on puppetry in Australia from Peter Serres and the Bayne sisters to the contemporary, adults only puppets of Captain Lazor and *Melbourne's Little Horner Show*.

The exhibition highlighted the cur-

rent problems of conserving and displaying objects which exist in a dynamic relationship between their users and their audience. Understandably the Gallery curators were concerned for the security of the items and equally understandably the 80 contributing mask and puppet creators were concerned that their creations lived in their space.



Mask and Puppet Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria

For Anna Sandler marks the puppets are "hunting uppers, containing within them the threat that they might at any moment move", and it was with that intention that she created an environment like an attic overcrowded with favourite toys, an amateur house of every child's and adult's dreams.

Although workshops and demonstrations were run in conjunction with the exhibition, it was clear that had there been a budget commensurate with the scope of the undertaking, more time to prepare it and more space in which to stage it, it could have been even more popular and instructive than it was. Nevertheless it drew more than 3,500 people in its first week.

Susanne Spurrer

BEECHAM AT THE ATHENAEUM

The Melbourne Theatre Company is currently presenting the Australian Premiere of *Beecham*, a play about the flamboyant and outrageous English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, at its Athenaeum 2 Theatre.

Beecham's director, Ron Rodger, said "Sir Thomas Beecham — Baronet and Companion of Honour — is synonymous with the development of music appreciation in Britain. The champion of Mozart

and Delius, in particular, it was Sir Thomas Beecham who first brought Dugdale and the Russian Ballet to prominent seasons at Covent Garden.

"During his lifetime he formed four major symphonic orchestras and was guest conductor with many of the great orchestras of Europe and America. He recorded some six memorable operas, symphonies and concertos and was one of the earliest conductors to have his works recorded onto magnetic tape and to use stereophonic recording methods.



Ron Butler

"Written to commemorate the centenary in 1979 of the birth of this remarkable Englishman, the play — *Beethoven* by Caryl Chesson and Ned Sherrin — attempts to capture a glimpse of the unique character of Sir Thomas Beecham and his music. The warm and often hilarious work is in the form of a biographical documentary, employing the device of a narrator (Michael Eddart) and the character Beecham (David Ravenwood).

"It has come to Australia following a successful season at the Apollo Theatre, London, in which Timothy Woot played Beecham, Terry Wain was the narrator, with Patrick Garland director.

"When its Australian Premiere commenced at the Athenaeum 3 Theatre on April 28, bookings had already exceeded two run-week seasons. The production represents for me the culmination of a 12 months' Director's Training Scheme offered by the Australian Council and the Melbourne Theatre Company."

YOUNG ACTORS TO STAR IN NEW MOVIES

Simpson Le Mouster Films have announced their lead for the role of the infamous Squerry Taylor, the notorious Australian underworld character of the

"30s about whom they are making the film, *Squerry*. David Atten is been cast in the starring role.

David Atten has been seen most recently in Nimrod's production of *The Chase* as Colin, and he also starred in *A Chance Love*. He has had a wealth of experience in every facet of the entertainment industry over the past 13 years.

After 14 years training including classical ballet and light baritone, David has worked in a staggering number of theatre and television productions, they include *Amor Gri Four Gun Dance*, *Guns and Dolls*, *Homeville*, *Division 4*, *Merlock Picher* and *Bedford*. *Squerry* begins production on June 1 at the Victorian Film Corporation's Slacks Factory Studio.

Shooting on *The Man From Snowy River* has already begun and another young Aus actor is billed by the producers of this film as "soon to be the most exciting new name in Australian cinema". Tom Burlinson was picked for the role of Jim Craig out of 1,000 young hopefuls, obviously his NIDA training stood him in good stead. Burlinson's credits include *On the Beach*, *The One Day of the Year*, *Cop Shop*, *The Restless Years* and *The Suburban*.

Also starring in *The Man From Snowy River* are Jack Thompson, Rick Douglas, Signe Thornton, Lorraine Bayly and Chris Haywood. Director is George Miller and one of the Executive Producers is Michael Edgley. As yet the actor who will portray Benjo Patterson himself has yet to be announced.

ST MARTINS — PROJECTING THE NEW IMAGE

St Martin's Youth Arts Centre opens this year with a season of exciting productions of theatre pieces by young people. The shows will be staged at the new theatre complex which incorporates three fully equipped studios designed specifically for the promotion and development of work by young members.

St Martin's opening production is the largest musical spectacle yet undertaken by the company, involving more than 80 young people as performers, musicians, technicians and crew.

When *Lepi Colide* is directed by Michael Minchman, Geoffrey O'Connell and Helena Roberts and is an epic celebration of some of the mythical figures who have shaped Australia's cultural consciousness. It focuses on the unreasonable Ilmatrou, Medea Queens and mythic magicians.

St Martin's continues to place increasing emphasis on the development of plays by young writers for a young audience, St Martin's will hold its second, week-long

seminar this year, commencing May 18. Special guest artists this year will include Dorothy Hewett, Ray Lawler, Barry Dickins and John Linn. Young people interested in participating in the Young Playwrights' Seminar as writers, performers or observers, should contact St Martin's on (03) 267 3838.

The St Martin's production of *Case's Head* will open at Nimrod on May 13.

STUDIO SYDNEY

The Studio Sydney Theatre Company will open its season at the Wayide Theatre in May with a Tennessee Williams double bill in honour of the American playwright's 50th birthday this year. S.S.'s Artistic Director Les Blake will play central roles in both plays — *The Luck of Earlspur* Leslie and *Jackson's Last Summer*.

Other members of the cast are Heather Christie, Christopher Pace and Lea Peom and both plays will be directed by Associate Artistic Director Ron Ferner.

The aim of Studio Sydney is to present incidents with high quality, small cast, non-commercial Australian and overseas productions suited to the intimate atmosphere of the Wayide Theatre, where they will perform until December.

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WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS



by Norman Russell

If even half the current rumours are true, Australia — or at least Melbourne and Sydney — will see a spate of revived musicals such as *London* and *New York* are now experiencing.

These really are common and should be treated as such, but among the titles now being bandied about are *Mi Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, *Oliver*, *Oklahoma* and *The Road to Horror Show*.

Conveniently, I hear that *White Horse* Ave., long touted by Noel "Let's Hear It For The Music!" Farnon and an one-figge firmly scheduled by the Ellensbach Theatre Trust as a Christmas 1981 holiday season attraction at Sydney's Regent Theatre, is once again a nonstarter. Trust spokespersons are not yet speaking, but the Trust is still holding that Regent date, so a replacement for the *Don* could be any of the above in which it might have an interest. Or perhaps a surprise?

Spicy additions to the rumour list: *Jelle Anthony* with *Mi Fair Lady*—John English, Nancye Hayes and, as Pigea, Gary (Gussie) McDonald with *Oliver*, co-producer Wilton Morley with the *Road to Horror Show*, upped as an end-of-year attraction at Sydney's Theatre Royal. (The Ellensbach Theatre Company is promoting its own revival of *The Road to Horror Show* in Wagga from July 17 to August 1.)

The "glorious uncertainty" of showbiz could not be better exemplified than by the success of Sydney's *Marion Street Theatre* production of *Dave Freeman's A Shedful of Foregivers*. Accorded not much more than polite acceptance by the critics and seen as a rather ill-timed choice by a theatre under threat of losing its subsidy because of "loosey-jans standards", it turned out to be that venue's most profitable show in more than two years. It plays to an average 80 per cent capacity and grossed more than \$100,000 at the box office. Director Peter Williams is now negotiating to take it on tour in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

And let's not forget this comedy was programmed and as director engaged by former artistic director Alastair Duncan long before he was sacked by the Marion

Street Board of directors. (The less said about the so-called comedy that followed, *Richard Harris' Crusade Edge*, the better.) And while we're on the success trip, a "well done" to all concerned with the Sydney Theatre Co's production of Dorothy Hewett's *The Man*, from Melbourne, which broke the box office record for a play at the Opera House Drama Theatre, with 45 performances to a more than 90 per cent capacity. Unfortunately the MTC's production didn't do so well.

Anyone that projected near for *A Shedful of Foregivers*, Peter Williams is experiencing a difficulty now besetting commercial managements generally — the unavailability of theatres. He tells me he simply cannot get dates for the London success *Fishyface* even with *Diana Clarke* starring. He does not expect either her or the rights to secure much longer available.

"It'll probably then be done either by the subsidised Melbourne or Sydney Theatre Company and if successful transfer into a commercial house," he says, rather angrily. "And on much more favourable terms than would be available to an operator like me."

It's an easy trap for a commercial theatre landlord to trade on the previous success of a show at a subsidised theatre.

"Another thing is that actors demand much higher pay from a commercial management than from a subsidised company, which may be very natural and obvious, but it doesn't help the business. I feel the whole scene needs a thorough shake-up."

Meanwhile, Williams, in association with Gary Poney and former Film Australia production head Tim Read, is preparing for his first venture into TV production. Script and pre-production details are in hand for a family drama series with a prison setting. To be made in conjunction with *Adrian's Cause*, and tentatively titled *Packard's Cause*, shooting of the pilot is expected to begin next spring.

And in his spare time, Peter is working on his next school holiday production. David Williamson is to play the *Phillip Street Theatre* from May 9 to 23.

In the February issue of *74* I quoted to the Theatre Board's use of "loosey-jans" as accusations of producers and performance standards of the 18 theatre companies it is responsible for subsidising. I have since been officially assured that all the Board's associates are people well vetted in the performing arts. Moreover, they are free, if they so wish, to identify themselves when attending a performance. Also that final accusations are a conscious expressly compiled from all associations' reports, that the Theatre Board then merely makes a recommendation about future subsidis-

ation which has to be approved by the full Australia Council, the final arbiter.

Peggy Mortimer, who directed *Parade Our Prisoner*, current show at *Mealy Muck Loh*, has just enjoyed an exciting month visiting her son Ron Toppens in Los Angeles. Her show incidentally, will run till the end of June, when Ron Fearer has a commitment for a six weeks drastic engagement. Coincidentally, the Toppens Family will be working the same stage. *Parade Our Prisoner* comes back to the Loh on August 22 and will run till December. The six weeks break will be filled by *Billy Raymond* and his Scottish revue, *A Touch of Taron*.

Grubbe Road's smash-hit show, *Don't Give Me Back*, after playing all Australian capitals, is now in Los Angeles, where on April 28 it opened a three-month season at the *Woodward Theatre* under the auspices of the *Ellensbach Theatre Trust's World Theatre Exchange Program*.

A last word on musical revivals. When a cult went out for youngsters for a London revival of *The Sound of Music*, more than 10,000, complete with Mums, applied for admission at the Apollo Victoria Theatre.

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SPOTLIGHT

THE VICTORIAN ARTS CENTRE

— How will it look?

Designer, John Truscott

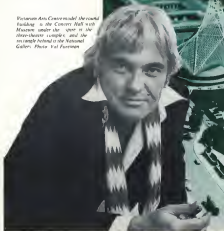
interviewed by Pamela Ruskin

In his studio in a City Road building adjoining the massive spread of the new recognizable Victorian Arts Centre fronting on to St Kilda Road, John Truscott perches on his stool and surveys the clutter of his work table. He is surrounded by inks, paints, brushes, swatches of fabric and leather and samples of metal. He holds a square of glass up to the light as he talks to the people who stand beside him. "Get some sandblasted glass from New Zealand," he says. A voice overrules, "Someone said something about Mullum glass" and another chimes in that "Some restaurants use it to get that turn of the century look". The discussion is terminated when a set of blue-prints is thrust into his hand and the others melt away.

It can't be easy being the centre of so much turmoil while engaged in the mammoth task of putting into effect the interior design of the entire Victorian Arts Centre. His appointment as designer of the project was an inspired choice by the committee headed by George Fairfax. Truscott is a designer who combines a brilliantly imaginative flair with the discipline of good taste. The Centre could not be in safer hands.

Truscott returned to Australia after

Victorian Arts Centre model: the round building is the Concert Hall with Museum under the spire is the eleven-theatre complex, and the triangular island is the National Gallery. Photo: Val Pearson



many years overseas to design the Victorian State Opera's production of *Adriano* in 1976. The man who had won laurels for both the stage play and the film of the musical, *Concerto*, winning the design Oscar for the film, and with many other triumphs to his credit, was so successful with the

small budget *Adriano*, that the Australian Opera bought his designs for the opera, producing it with Joan Sutherland singing the title. He returned the following year to design an exquisite production of *The Pearl Fishers* for the VSO and again the Australian Opera was so impressed that the VSO took it to Sydney and this time it was their production that was seen at the Opera House.

Certainly these couldn't be a much bigger job than this one that involves amongst other areas, a cast circular Concert Hall with theatrical museum included, a three theatre complex, restaurants, bars, back stage facilities including green rooms, dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms and so on. It's a mammoth task because amid all the more glamorous and obvious facets of the design, every detail down to each power point and electric light switch has to be included.

Beginning such an undertaking means that you have to have a sense of direction. One of the important factors is that much of the Arts Centre is subterranean, the creation of a light and almost other world atmosphere has become central to Truscott's thinking. "The auditorium of the circular Concert Hall was just poured cement when I first saw it. So I had to decide what to do with this fairly icy, impersonal and gloomy interior. I had the idea of using the colours of Australian quartz crystals, our semi-precious stones. This brought about a further idea of using situations and colourations as you see them when looking through spin rock." "Like a seam of opal?" "Yes! Just like that."

"The colours of these semi-precious stones are marvellously rich. Some of these colours will be painted on cement with dyes so that the texture of the cement comes through, the effect of wet rock but cloudier. Some walls and ceilings when painted will be overlaid with projections of the same colourations to give a three-dimensional quality."

He explains that the foyer walk will be padded with golden, antique leather which is not a bright gold but a dull, soft colour. Banding this, horizontally, there will be three rows of brass, brass at the skirting boards, at ceiling level and at the wall joints too. The ceiling itself will be Dutch leaf that gives a burnished antique look on gold. The

target colour is one of the jewel colours, that of rhodochite, a deep red that shades almost to garnet. This building is on five levels and it is the street level that is the highest. The floor at street level is of travertine marble in the same rhodochite colour but as the levels descend carpet is used as rhodochite tones that get darker as they descend. On these levels the marble is used only round the bars and elevators.

"The walls along the stairwells are broken with areas of bevelled mirrors. All the wall perimeters in the theatre areas have wide troughs embedded in the floor and they are light sources, lighting the walls from the floor. Also the bush-hammered columns have bases with similar light sources, to give a sense of lightness to this largely subterranean building."

All the time he is talking, John wanders around, finding samples of leather, of carpet colours, pieces of crystal, metal or glass and showing them to me to illustrate his ideas.

"It's difficult to explain what I mean. For instance, interspersed throughout the building are light walls - artist created panels, back lit to give a crystalline effect in jewel colours. These are to break up the leather walls. There will be decorative art works of chrome, plexiglass and brass, very prismatic in form. So they are not only decorative hangings but a surface to bounce light from. Suspended from one storey above St Kilda Road level and going down the full five storeys in a void area is a laser beam sculpture which is a by-product of laser beams." The colours created by laser beams and the shapes are dazzling and a sculpture of this kind promises to be magnificent.

The seating colour will be different in each auditorium, using the quartz crystal colours once again. "Seats will be covered in wool fabrics, textures and colours to harmonize with the walls. There will be blocks of seats in each theatre of different shades, very muted in colour, each block softly merging into the next colour block. The fabric is very tweedy looking. It is a wool buckle really in mixed tones."

"All very fine," I say, "but what about the seats themselves? Will they be more comfortable than those dreadfully hard ones in the Sydney Opera House?" "They certainly will. A



SPOTLIGHT

immense lot of time and effort has been put into the choice of seats and they are marvelously comfortable, the ones that have been chosen."

Not from any point of view, has John Truscott got an easy job. He has to deal with huge quantities of materials and the assessment of amounts required is a big responsibility. He is also under pressure in terms of time. The Concert Hall is supposed to be finished by the end of this year, subject to strikes which have been almost constant since work on the project began.

While the public think of the Concert Hall as an auditorium, the back stage areas are very large and varied and even here the semi-precious stone theme has been carried through. "The Green Room will be very green because it is based on chrysophane. Superb with the light through it. The conductors' room is tortoiseshell and copper. I've used lots of sand colours back stage to lighten these areas and make them liveable and pleasant. As much attention has been given to the back as the front of the house. This will be a great attraction to visiting artists."

Returning to the Concert Hall, Truscott explains that he is using very theatrical lighting for the front of the house. "I've tried too, to use as much Australian material as possible in every area of design. I've only used imported material where Australian is not available and that's only in minor instances." I asked him about the pieces of glass that he was discussing when I came in. "I'm getting some wonderful effects with glass. Dyes swirled around glass give the effect of marble. See this piece here" — and he holds it up to the light — "See how wonderful it looks with the light behind it. Some glass" — he grabs another piece — "like this has a tweed-like texture. That is obtained by pressing a mould into it when the glass is hot."

"What else can I tell you? There are so many details involved. The wood is Queensland walnut, the theatre colours for the three theatres are based on alloys. The State Theatre on brass, the Playhouse on pewter, the Studio on copper, and the semi-precious stones provide the seat and other colours. I've seen and heard the Concert Hall organ

in Quebec where it is being built. It's absolutely superb."

A rare, almost illegal privilege is given to me and John takes me through to where his models of the Concert Hall and the three theatres are displayed. They are very exciting, as are his sketches and paintings of the main foyer and other interiors. While nothing can or ever will compare with the externals of the Sydney Opera House or its view over the harbour, in terms of sheer magnificence, functional efficiency and comfort, front and back of the house, I believe the Victorian Arts Centre's interior will far surpass it.

Time will tell and time is what is eating up the funds available for the project. With each successive strike, whether it be over the builders' loan or a few days, time is lost, costs leap up and the opening date of the Concert Hall, now postponed to early 1982, recedes and it is the taxpayer who ultimately foots the bill. Meanwhile, 33 hour weeks make headlines, while John Truscott works a 64 hour day and often an 80 hour week to bring his plans and dreams to fruition.



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QUEENSLAND THEATRE

by Jeremy Ridgman

As the obfuscating fog of sub-tropical summer lifts from the Brisbane skyline and gives way to the clear-headedness of balmy days and cool nights, it may be appropriate to make a few observations about recent theatrical developments and scan the road ahead.

The three major subsidised companies in the city (one must unfortunately discount the stimulating Brisbane Actors' Company, who mess with frustrating irregularity) appear to have weathered the first fifteen months of the dependent existence with their pennants fluttering encouragingly in the breeze. TN's *The Choir*, the QTC's *Mourning Becomes Electric* and La Boite's *Troilus* have been among the most auspicious signs that the forms of autonomy and compromise need not win the day.

The TN Company, almost torn apart last year by the reaction to the failure of John Milson's adventurous programming to attract subscribers, went into sequestration for several months in a 'project and survive' bid to keep its bank balance in the black and hence merit adequate funding. They have re-emerged with Bryan Nason, a director of flair and guru-like charisma, at the helm and a young but dynamic company assembled for whom appears to be a character defining season. *Hamlet*, a qualified critical success but inevitably popular and published with astounding efficiency, saw Nason, a devotee of Shakespeare, using some of the state's most interesting younger actors, among them, Geoff Carrwright and Judith Anderson, backed by supermemorisers called from the Kelvin Grove C.A.E. theatre diploma course. A 'special relationship' appears to have developed with the college who in turn provide office space and facilities to what has become virtually a nomadic company due to the inordinate expense of using the Twelfth Night Theatre building itself. The test was set up in the University's Crescent Box Theatre for the coup of the season, the

second and apparently authoritatively approved production of *The Choir* and will move to a city church hall for an improvisatory variation on themes from *The Comedy of Errors*, dubbed *Shit & Friends*.

So chequered is the TN's history that only foolhardily would one risk prophesying their future, the conditions are certainly there for a renaissance under Nason's command, enthusiasm, vibrancy and a canny sense of where the audiences are to be found. The QTC on the other hand have need to look no further. With 3,000 subscribers (the second longest list in the country) they have commenced both their first production this year with a virtual sell-out. It would be childish perhaps to baulk at a state company's using subsidy to mount a commercial hit such as *Amadeus*, especially if the Theatre Board makes provision for such a choice if balanced with less frothy fare and if tours of southern produced musicals such as *Amos* and *Evans* are determined to give Brisbane a wide berth. However, the hegemony of the subscriber, besides recently being the cause of some stormy reactions to less

than ecstatic critical receptions in a number of publications, including TA, which has no effect on how many turns hit the seats, is surely irrevocable in a subsidised set-up when one is obliged to pay for a lightweight musical simply in order to be sure of a seat for, say *Car on a Hot Tin Roof* or *The Seagull*. Unfortunately, the QTC, forging ahead artistically with headbashed by an over-determined attitude to what it sees as a uniquely Brisbane type of audience who know what they like. The unwillingness to take risks, surely anathema to subsidised art, is epitomised by the choice of *No Noises, No Park Drift* as the one new Australian play of the season, though curiously a possible 'alternative' season being initiated might scotch one's doubts. The question is, how alternative is 'alternative'?

Ironically, La Boite, whose recent graduation from recipient of a Project Grant to that of a General Grant must indicate a new maturity in the eyes of the Australia Council, finds itself this year mounting plays such as *Wings* and *Mars Barons* which, elsewhere, have been the diet of the state company. Malcolm Blaylock, La Boite's artistic director of eighteen months' standing, is concerned that the three companies threaten to generate towards a middle ground in their style of programming. His answer is to push for La Boite's identity as a community theatre, moving outside the Hale Street building and acting as a catalyst in various areas of the city's life. A show with this sort of potential was *Deckmoo*, which played to unions, political groups etc and was one of the most successful in last year's season of Australian plays, many of them politically orientated. In this main house seasons, Blaylock seems determined to fulfill the theatre's now declared commitment to indigenous writing and in this month, appropriately, repeating its role as host to the Queensland Playwrights Conference.



TN Artistic Director Bryan Nason

International Theatre Season

Claire Dan and Anthony Steele discuss the project

with Lucy Wagner

It showed a considerable amount of vision to predict that the Australian tour of *The Liberation of Skopje* would be the success it turned out. It was acclaimed as the high point of both Sydney and Perth Festivals and did excellent business at all its venues — in spite of its subject matter being the effect of World War Two on an obscure Yugoslavian town and performed totally in a Yugoslavian dialect. What is more, over 90% of its audiences were Anglo-Saxon Australians.

The vision behind the Australia season of *Skopje* is that of Claire Dan OBE and the organisation she has brought into existence and called the International Theatre Season.

There has been some confusion between that and the World Theatre Exchange programme, published by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Australia Council Theatre Board some eighteen months ago. The projected World Theatre Exchange aimed to import overseas productions in exchange for a tour to that company's venue as an Australian show, thus hoping to set up an international touring circuit. It seemed like a good idea, and knowing Miss Dan's plans, the organisers invited her and her Cladan Institute to become the administrative centre for the programme.

The problem, according to the Season's Artistic Advisor, Anthony Steele, AM, was that "It was really just a gleam in (Theatre Board Chairman) Brian Sweeney's eye, but there was no money attached to it. Cladan Institute tried to pick up and help as it seemed so mild in with our International Theatre Season plans, but it never got properly started."

My lap and I was supposed to provide all the money so I pulled out. To talk

about an exchange is asking too much to start with, it's trying to do two things at once. The first step is to get them here and then we think productions will naturally start going the other way."

The Cladan Institute started work on the ITS project some years ago — in fact at the same time as its now extremely successful International Piano Competition, but it seemed a riskier plan than the Competition and needed more research. So, after a false start with the World Theatre Exchange idea, the real International Theatre Season got off to a flying start this year with its first production, *The Liberation of Skopje*.

It wasn't as simple as it looks with hindsight, however. Claire Dan found herself "in disagreement with my friends all over the world who said a would only work with classical theatre. But I wanted modern theatre; Australia is a young country and I wanted to do something that had never been tried before. In my research I discovered that language is not

necessarily the prime consideration in good modern theatre, it is so often very visual. *Skopje* proved that. Everyone said I was crazy — even the day before it opened they told me 'Send them back'. No one believed in it, so on the Australian side I financed it all myself. Of course I nearly died of fright, but it worked out alright."

Now ITS has two further productions this year, one from Greece and one from Holland, to run consecutively this month. The ITS seasons will be necessarily spasmodic, depending on the availability of in-coming companies, venues in Australia and of course the finance side. The idea is simply to mount international productions in a totally professional fashion right in the mainstream of Australian theatre-going — "not in a ghetto".

So from April 30 at the Theatre Royal, Sydney, the Greek Amphitheatre Company's production of Menander's *Epitaphios* (*The Arbitration*) will be playing for ten days and then moving on to the Melbourne Her Majesty's for a further 12 performances. This revival of *The Arbitration* premiered at the Epidaurus Festival last August to great acclaim. Anthony Steele believes it was aimed to a degree at the foreign visitors to the Festival and so can work well here.

Director, Spyros Evangelinos has taken as a starting point the fact that Menander's comedies, although not that great in themselves, had an enormous influence on later comedy writers through the ages. Accordingly he has set each of the five acts in a different period and with a different acting style. Act I starts as off in ancient Greek theatre. It is played as commedia dell'arte, III appears as a Molière play, Act IV becomes Victor-



Claire Dan OBE.



The Liberation

an melodrama, and Y moves to the style of Greek cinema in the '50s! The acts are connected by mimed interludes showing the troupe as travelling players — here in tragic rather than comic mode — journeying symbolically through the ages.

Anthony Steele thinks that there will probably be a higher proportion of Greek Australians going to the show than Yugoslavians attending *Skopje*, especially as they've had the luck to catch Greek Week during the Melbourne run. But he hopes it will still have the desired effect of giving Australian audiences and theatre a strong dose of a non Anglo-Saxon influence.

Following that (from May 11) we will have the chance to see *Delusion*, the work of the leading Dutch "alternative" company, De Horde (The Herd). A household name in Europe, Steele feels this show may be harder to sell, particularly to the age group De Horde play to at home, the 18 to 21 year olds.

Their style is individual and perhaps the best description of it is the outdated term "Theatres of the Absurd". De Horde deal in such theatrical images of an uncertain modern day world and ground their shows in rock music (actors and musicians are interchangeable). A major feature of *Delusion* is an incredible set, built especially for touring with a grant from the Prince Bernhard Foundation. It consists of a street where motorist vehicles appear, the houses are all out of perspective including one interior that makes the actors look gigantic — "a punk version of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*" — various traps, swing doors and dangerous slopes. As one might expect, the actors have split second timing and amazing physical control, and with the great Dutch linguistic ability they are quite able to give the performances in English.

If *The Liberation of Skopje* was an indication, the imagination and foresight of Claire Dan and Anthony Steele should ensure equal success for these two acclaimed productions. Just as *Skopje* showed among other things, the enormous potential for open air theatre in this temperate climate, so these should demonstrate further possibilities for new directions and added dimensions in theatre here.

THE PRAM IN 1981

Approaching a hair pin bend

Every year for the past three I have dutifully clambered up the steps at 325 Drummond Street as the early autumn sun fitfully rises over Lygon Street, cassette recorder in one hand and recent press releases in the other, and asked the infernal question, about directions for the coming year.



by Suzanne Spurrer

To put the question to any other theatre company would be superfluous in the extreme, but around the Pram the answer is of vital importance because past practice is never taken for granted. Moreover in recent years, when it has been under stress from all flanks, the question has been posed in the most fundamental terms — will it survive, if so, how and in what form?

Every year if I have not exactly come away with "the answer", I have at least unpicked the key phrases and maintained an up-to-date lexicon of the stuff in vocabulary around the place. The key phrases for 1979 were, "New Economic Policy", "Self-Autonomous Projects" and "Positive Discrimination in favour of women". In 1980 the big word was "Ensemble" and all references to director were to be excised henceforth and replaced by "mediator". Phrases from earlier times still ring around the building — "Collective" (as in "Collective meeting", "Collective decision", "Collective hassles" etc etc), "Self-management", "Group-derived" and "Theatreworker" tended to be stayers.

I'm happy to report that this year is no different, except that the words currently in vogue have a familiar ring to them, in fact you could almost say that they have been resurrected or, as it might be said, revalued and restarted. They are "Director" as in, "outside directors", "new directors", "the need to foster the growth of " and "Writer" as in "outside playwrights", "new playwrights", "the need to foster the growth of ".

Thus in the first issue of APG News incorporating *The Persimmoner* and *The APG Newsletter* we find:

The APG this year will help five directors to get their projects off the ground. At a time when arts funding is being severely reduced, the Directors programme is a boldly progressive scheme. The successful applicants are David Kendall, Roger Pulvers, Peter Fredrick, Richard Murphy and Val Kirwan. Although the five proposals are different, they are all concerned with exploring the possibilities of unusual texts.

The General Manager of the APG, John Tunin described the new policy of allocating a proportion of the budget for outside directors to work at the

From us, "the most radical turn around — in the past directors were superfluous, at best." Headed by the Ensemble (who are now known as the Core Group) had begun to feel the need to get people in to direct, and it was on this basis that Nick Larkins came in and directed the Ensemble's most recent show, *Kate Kelly's Travelling Circus*. Now it has become a matter of supplementing the greatly depleted Ensemble and ultimately arriving at an ensemble company "in a more organic way." So it was decided to give the directors a chance to open up the place.

Though the Ensemble actually chose the programme, "choosing the directors was choosing the programme because each director's application was on the basis of a particular programme. But," he added, "they have had absolute freedom in casting." The two productions to date, David Kendall's production of *The Real Life Of Sebastian Morpho* and Roger Pulvers' production of *The Two-headed Calf* have included no APG actors and only one actor who has worked previously in an APG production. Timlin added that as yet a form between the different groups had not developed, but that he had hopes that it would eventually, and from that rapport and exchange at least the bones of the 1983 programme might emerge.

Jon Hawkes, long time APG member, has only recently returned

with Circus Oz and he finds the move toward directors an "interesting" volte-face: "I guess I find it ironic that the APG now says as its saving grace the Directors' Development Fund. It's very funny that a group that has been so anti-director ends up saving itself by employing directors. But on the other hand it's a great idea because it's good to have a group other than the Theatre Board making decisions about which directors are supported, simply because it means you get a different point of view."

The search for new playwrights has been a recurrent enterprise since 1978 when their first major playwrighting competition led to the production of Barry Deakin's *Footballer's Heart* and Stephen Sewell's *Tramway*. The judging of this year's competition has only recently been finished. In excess of a hundred scripts were received and read by the Core Group — Peter King, Denis Moore, Richard Healey, Danny Nash and Val Leksowitz. According to Timlin there were many Williamson imitators and would-be or actual television writers. He added that the competition obviously does a lot to publicise the fact that the Frim Factory is still in existence.

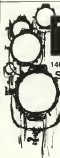
There have been a number of scripts coming in after the closing date. These are still being read because there is a commitment in the competition to mount productions of two scripts, and

as yet only one, *Steel City*. Sewer by Joy Wickenstrat, has been definitely programmed. In addition six rehearsed readings of new Australian writing have already been presented on Sunday afternoons, and more are scheduled. The readings have included selections from the current Playwrights' Competition as well as new works by established writers: Jack Hibberd and George Dryden's new musical comedy, *Swash Bu*, which had been commissioned last year through the Music Board of the Australian Council, was recently read. These readings have aroused considerable interest and have been attended by between eighty and one hundred people, and as well have provided an invaluable service to the writers themselves.

In addition to producing the two plays chosen from the Playwrights' Competition, the Core Group are in the process of devising a portable music theatre piece and they will be performing later this year in the new play by Tim Robertson based on Storm's *Tramway Show*.

As John Timlin said this time, and has no doubt said before — "The Frim has a way of coming good every time there's a crisis."

I deduced I imagine in a year's time I'll be back there again and that then the key words may well be "new venue" and "organically created company".



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THE ELLIS COLUMN IN MURWILL

*In Murwillumbah in Murwillumbah
In Murwillumbah you know what the
sister means
And she can mean to be, oh dear
And who can mean to be
In
Murwillumbah
Sah*

© Bob Ellis and Mervyn Drake
from *A Very Good Year*, 1980

Ellis, walking home in the fragrant dark, passed in the lamplight beneath the pink hangings on his new front lawn and left at peace. Months danced round his face. The Hills House climbed in the dark. He looked up at his big old wren-like mares, furnished with warbling lute by his muscular octogenarian parents and decided to later outside instead, among the dancing ocellus and the nostalgia.

The Tweed Valley dreamed around here. None of the houses was any different. A little way from here Roy Masters, he and David Ellard had been schoolboys together. Three houses down the street, John Hargreaves had grown up, very quietly. A bus ride away, Carmen Duncan and Paula. Two blocks away Bill Pike, the founder of Rebel Airways, now welcoming his old friend home in the national headlines, alongside "Ellis Russian Spy". A good basic belly-landing man, gone bald of course by now. Time passes. A block away the Seventh Day Adventist church that his grandfather founded in a mad month in 1987. Beyond that the Tweed Dark Leonard Teale had been an announcer here, before he was a bomber pilot over Europe and then Superman, and John Heyworth a reporter, after he had been a soldier and before he became a lovely moving playwright in the wrong tomorrow one. We all pass through, thought Ellis. But why do we leave? And for what do we leave? And is it enough?

Freddie had got to the aging minimalist actress. There was looking out comfortable.

*She walked a mile and paced operatically
round in the centre asking as if in search of
a prince. Ellis twined in his way and
leaved the work. Then she reached
down into a box and pulled out of it a
human head. It was green in colour and the
surface of a piece. "There," she said. "You
have the most beautiful thing under your
arm." "On the contrary," said Bazo,
putting it back in the box and dropping
pinks on top of it, "it's the most revolting
thing I've ever seen" and walked out
stomping the door. Dressed in his
sudden absence the grand dance picked up
a Wedge and got and crashed it against a
brake. There are old oak, there and crashed
it through the window. Then she fell so
crazy a sleeping, being a sister pike.
Ellis felt out of his depth. He said he was
he going, dressed seven thousand miles
through the quiet front door and ran
like fast. "An error..." came the
madness's phantoms back through the
shell. Pinks, mingles and a further
sawtooth crash. Ellis, as everything was
then avoided and brought to earth in
suddenness as in a big black African
dog. Strapping the Siyuan bear out
from him, he lurched disoriented to his
knees and bawled a note. "Caroline Street
Carillon," he moaned, and ran well on his
way to Albany when the Croatian madman
at the wheel confessed that in all his two
hours driving calls he had never heard of
the Carillon. An hour later they arrived
in Lismore in a mere forty dollars and
Bazo's looked from above. Ellis, leafless,
looked the bell. Bazo came down in his
suspense. "What are you doing here?" he
shouted. "Go back and confess that
woman. Otherwise she'll die alone, and
have tomorrow a whole new set of
employees on." Ellis refused from
governing the girl, understood Albanian
progress. He was not as fit as then he
was, turned a sleeping against sleep
in a house and the next day they in
sister's collaboration in a new Barman's*

Beachhead with the elegance and a cool-
ness wild of waving manure. Five
days later it opened. It failed seven-
days. Both were dressed out of
Melbourne and hair not returned. Their
collaboration saved Ellis, though
obviously planned this horror catastrophe
on a shrouded human head. He wondered
crazily a hour it was. He hoped it had been
a day for. On another plain night, like Ellis
and Bazo, did it from the inside and out
of his depth. He wondered if he could ever
get used to the subtle rhythms of his life.

The month, in hindsight, followed him
wonderfully into his big bright house. He
sat down amid a nightmare of clothing
lenses and got wearily to work on his
last multinational treaty, a screenplay of
The Prince of Pentamere to be filmed in
Lismore, with Marco Chumad, the
bravely smiling Sah Lake singing virgin
as Mabel the British housewife Ted
Hamilton, the semi-Californian cop-
producer, as the cockney constable, and he
presumed Rask Hudson as the modern
Major-General. Ellis needed the money, to
pay off the house in which he sat, looking
out through tinted lenses at purple
lenses in the choking dark and dumbly
conspiring virgins of yore. He should, he
realised, have married Delia Canning
later the north coast Banana Queen, but
she had had the implied threat of his
flying surname and so became the local
opponent's mother for twenty years.
That is real, he thought, looking out in
the night at the ordinary silent town and
feeling ordinary too, with relief. This is
not. He closed the door and went to bed.

"Ellis did you I have great news," and
the voice on the phone "Whoham," said
Ellis, drawing at once in his telepho-
nical inefficiency the large, unshaded,
Liberalising advertising front whose
apocalypse and monophony at which force
The Song of Frank Sinatra had been sent
the King O'Malley Theatre Company
apocalypse broke. "What is it? What

LUMBAH...

born" Ellis remembered former wrong, like how the film rights of his club favored mainstream, had been flagged off at most of the opening night to the half-a-million-dollar Ted Hamilton for movie-five thousand members, of which member Ellis, his unpaid director, producer, defender and impoverished patron, now chairman. An unpaid director, producer and script editor had seen one red screen "What's happening to the film of your play?" "We're having difficulty saving the newly married and already written role of Frank Sinatra," said the screen deal. "Has it been tried the other way?" asked Ellis, noncommittally anxious. "Yes, the husband, his wife there as well as the stars Ellis," proceeded Whitburn, wearing of the cross reminder of old bewilderment and anxious to get on with the next. "First the good news. My Cullen and I have formed the Balmora Theatre Company, which is all about the same point as yours and for the same reason." Ellis replied "You have an idea then, what?" he gazed. "She is the bad news." "The bad news is that to be eligible to be a partner you must be in Balmora." "But I," said Ellis, feeling an ominous shuddering in his heart. "Don't live in Balmora." "Enough," said the man, Cullen, who flash-flashed "Sorry old lad, but that's what the Union of course you are to have the area, not further in real estate, if it can't be a partner."

"But," added Ellis, "You wouldn't even be in this business if it didn't turn for me. When I found you, you were a fine young man who had been down almost twenty years from door to door. And look at you now. Eighteen years." "You may rest assured," said Whitburn, "that I will always be grateful for the members of our trip."

Ellis awoke in a bed full of dead roots. All had turned against the thousand warrens, now completely left alone in the early dawn of his head. He picked up a handful of these rusted skeletons, gone to their

pointless fiery Valhalla and pondered solemnly "Ah well," he muttered aloud. "That's showbiz," the familiar transaction, sounding shallow now in the wake of the last-borne Whitburn, gave to his mouth a strange, flat, whoppy, dead note. Driving the cause he spat out a mouth and then with maddening gravity consigned him and his fellow doers to some rapid flashing oblivion. "Who is this man Ellis?" mocked Ken Phelby from the Australian NFA. No further action. Fugued a heart attack, then un-Ellis did, and retired home, a wound, to rural Australia. More Lumbah probably. Quite right too. Never should have left. Should have stayed a catastrophe in the road, and never dared the iron glory of Broadway. The glory that kills as quick as look at you.

John Osborne, pursued by poverty and drinking him to, turned abruptly to Ellis and said with pungent disbelief "You're the one having being I've met in this country. Who do you think this is?" "Bromie," said Ellis, nodding with effort in far-flung matters. "It's only the idea that are gone enough to go up and talk to you. And that's where you get your material."

"That's both an interesting theory," said Osborne, strong his words, "and a devastating admission. I had a dream this morning," he rose on only placed over tonight, suggesting a further grooved concept with the air of one who has lived, "in a black hole, a darkness in someone's eye, hearing in the glow of my hotel's window and screaming in perfect Australian accent: 'Cripes! The outside, man! The darkness of the bath! But don't you fuckin' look at cause it's all a re-fuckin' go!'"

His on-Australianism was a gift of outer sympathy, and Ellis, remembering his long and a mysterious travelling in his, hearing him to hearing heart, a right to up stage grasped it with delight as

his eternal ordinariness, his ever dressed up as an in-salubrious creature, and the fundamental ordinariness of all who are it's all what's got the most human ordinariness, like the darkness of the bush, but we must try to see the one one somewhere, and the like motion against the jagged light of God and Apollo. Or man a?" Who see that in house instead?

Ordinary people, thought Ellis, approaching down Main Street the book shop of his Avenue Lot. My grandsons were buried here, and dug up to provide a housing estate. I have left a dead sister here, killed on Highway One, and two dead cousins, killed on Highway One in separate collisions. An uncle struck by lightning while playing golf who survived to moulder away, a warning alcoholic in front of my mother's TV. An aunt who washed the faded sheets of the dying and buried them into their graves. An uncle who travelled in terror, and one who dug for diamonds and one who worked in a sugar mill down all his days. These men must be served. They should not pass. Deafened people, come here to the North Coast, thought Ellis. I know because I have met them. Foggarty and Muzumbar, Magwitch and Gurnadine, they light up my dreams and bring joy to my morning eye. They shall not pass. He entered the Animal Cafe and bought a milkshake, and left at home. The first girl he ever loved came up and sat down. They talked of old times, and the awful happens up in the hills and what did they think they were proving, and the meeting. Advancing congregation and wasn't that good. A long ride back to square one, he thought. Thank Christ it's all still there.

In the glassy window of a cinema (metaphorically a former actor, then in the long, he turned away angry. He should have stayed at home, he thought, and opened a barbers one door. He was not far from in prison, glad he had a door to the day out.

Theatre Australia Guide to Playwriting

Edited by John McCallum

There has not been a dramatic revival for quite some time — largely because we haven't needed one. It can take hundreds of years for a young culture to find its own voice, to establish an autonomous, mature cultural tradition (particularly in the most complex of arts, the theatre) but when it comes it is, in A.D. Hope's words, "sudden, brilliant and permanent."

There is no doubt that it has come, in theatre and film, during the last decade. And probably the greatest single contribution, in theatre at least, has been made by playwrights. The two great theatrical success stories of the 70s, the APG and *Nimrod*, have built up their reputation by close association with different writers. It is to a large degree Australian plays that have won the new audiences. It is the new Australian drama that has received the most critical attention. (Although that is a bias that ought to be rectified, as critics began to look seriously at new theatrical styles generally.)

And yet many playwrights still feel they are the poor cousins of the theatre. To open this playwrights' issue *Theatre Australia* asked a number of Australian writers for the theatre to comment, both generally and personally.

David
Williamson

"Pressure on governments to

increase funding."

My feeling is that in the eighties we will see an explosion of Australian creativity on all fronts. The obvious boom in the film industry is already with us and this year's Playwrights' Conference attracted a record number of scripts. A process of artistic self-definition and self-assessment is occurring which perhaps has a parallel in the flurry of artistic activity in Elizabethan England when its writers suddenly discovered that they didn't have to forever regard themselves as a European backwater, but had the power in their own hands to create their own myths and in a sense invent themselves.

This doesn't mean endless rearguard actions of Ned Kelly Shakespeare set his plays wherever there was the possibility of finding drama, but they were nonetheless plays which could only have been written by an Englishman coming out of a specific social, political and historical setting.

The main need for Australian theatre is to have the venues and the production expertise to give the burst of creativity a fair hearing in our theatres. The Federal and State policy of some years back, to fund only one or two groups in a Capital is thankfully on the retreat, but the dissemination of theatrical funding could go much further. Pressure on Federal and State governments to increase the total funding, so that new companies can be accommodated without lowering the standards of existing ones, is an urgent priority. Perhaps the most urgent. Experience around the world shows that bold new writing seldom surfaces outside the subsidised arena, and it would be

foolish to think our experience will be any different.

Jack
Hibberd

"Still at the stage of idols and iconoclasm."

The central problems confronting Australian playwrights today are not the immediately professional and industrial, ie, contracts, residencies, relationships with boards, management and conferences. They are cultural and artistic, the more long-term problems.

As I see it, the two most pernicious phenomena likely to affect, directly or indirectly, the Australian playwright these days are the instant elevation of some of our good writers to the status of cultural heroes and the persistence of the Cultural Cringe.

The first tends to sap the lived writer of personal critical and creative vigour, luring him or her into the self-careering quagmires of cultism and overproduction. In an immature and sensationalist milieu (partly the product of a fatuous trend-driven media) a real period of assent bonafide is instant dismissal once the inevitable stultification occurs. We are still at the stage of idols and iconoclasm.

Related to all of this is the enduring treatment of Australian plays as novelties by the profession and public,

in Australia

once successful they promptly disappear into a literary fog. There is little serious contemplation and reevaluation of our drama on the stage. We are happily creating a theatre without a history, neglecting to build a living tradition for the contemporary theatre to respond to and against.

The Cultural Change is alive and well, as manifested by the uncritical adulation of such second-rate writers as Handke, Pasolunghi and Mamet, the servile approval given to the Old Vic's stale and effeminate *Hamlet*, and the barely disguised relief emanating when some local writers turn away (quite legitimately) from Australia as a subject.

Many artistic directors, despite their noble programming records, deep down consider Australia unworthy of serious artistic consideration. Many of their productions reveal this attitude, sometimes superciliously, before the local bazaar. Rather than enjoy a grapple with the dogs, they much prefer to draw his distasteful fangs or dress him in the circus clothes of faintness.

Paradoxically, the only important new directions in recent Australian theatre have had little to do with the playwrights and nothing to do with the mainstream theatre.

I refer to the Melbourne-endered Community Theatre movement as well as to Fanny's raw and ebullient theatre restaurants, a breeding ground for social and political satire.

There are now six professional community theatre companies operating within Victoria's sphere of influence. Should this movement ex-

pend around Australia, it could eventually stimulate the growth of a grass roots theatre culture, an infrastructure sadly lacking at the moment.

I find these developments far more exciting and crucial to the future of Australian theatre than anything happening within the conventional and alternative areas or in recent writing (including my own).

They are unquestionably of much more significance (thence their neglect by the Sydneiocentric national press) than the Melbourne-to-Sydney transpositions which have to do with mere life styles, employment and careers, not ideas or fresh directions.

Roger Pulvers

"Melbourne-Sydney rivalry as bunkum."

I want to say that there is at least one person working in theatre in Melbourne who sees the 'Melbourne-Sydney rivalry' as bunkum.

Why did we let the media latch on to this and puff it into an issue? Sure, there are cultural differences between the two cities — a different lifestyle of theatre. Sydney is invariably more showy, more up-front theatrical and effective. Melbourne is lay-back, pensive, and wicked.

But I don't really care! Both cities have excellent writers, directors, actors, and designers. If anything, they complement, not negate, each other. We must rid ourselves of this false

notion. If we want to make comparisons, let's compare ourselves with the best theatre we've seen in other countries. Australian theatre is most certainly a part of world theatre.

Now, there must be a more vigorous commitment to experimental theatre in this country. Experimental theatre is the Research and Development of our stage culture. I feel we are moving beyond the phase of mirrored recognition of ourselves on stage. Our theatre must use the stage as demonstration of these aspects in our personalities which we ourselves know are there but are afraid to recognize. Criticism that celebrates has a liver of lip and a knee as weak as water.

To be specific, we need theatre that looks at our problems through the eyes of migrants (not vice versa), that debunks our self-centred romantic nationalism — which is really part and parcel of our nagging provincialism, that explores our history in such a way that it exposes a whole sub-set of causes that our media would have us believe do not exist.

A theatre of possibilities is a country where newspapers have reneged their role of watchdog opens the stage for playwrights. Let's get our teeth into the official pant legs and not let go till the beasts howl!

Dorothy Hewett

"I'm not at all happy with my professional role."

Having just experienced my most exciting and successful theatre season

with *The Man from Mukungup* at the Sydney Opera House I am disposed to be benign, but will struggle against the temptation.

Things are I believe looking up for the Australian playwright. Evidence: A more general acceptance of our work by the public, managers, directors, perhaps even reviewers, although they lag behind badly in the structure. I have never had any problems with actors, designers, or stage technicians generally.

After having worked with Rodney Fisher on the *Mukungup* season I know now what I have always believed possible, and occasionally, sporadically experienced, that it is possible for director, playwright, cast, designer, lighting expert, to work together in glorious harmony, and for the playwright to be an integral and central member of that team work. It will now be my ambition to repeat the experience.

Generally speaking I'm not at all happy with my professional role in the structure and management of theatre. I will long to be associated with an actual company in the working out of scripts, and the general life of that company. A few lucky mavericks seem to have achieved this but for me it remains a mirage. Until such a situation is taken for granted I don't see how the Australian playwright can be anything else but an outsider.

It's difficult to talk about the theatre in this country as a whole because it varies so extraordinarily from state to state, company to company, director to director. There are still centres of hubbub, conservatism, insipidity, bullying, exclusiveness, but the general picture for the playwright is more optimistic.

Example: (1) I sat in on all the discussions in the opening weeks of *Mukungup*, both in the group and with individual actors. I was warmly welcome at all rehearsals, and my opinions sought for and carefully listened to. Never once was I ever made to feel that I was not an important and central component of the final success of the production. That in essence this is an unusual and deeply rewarding experience proves I suppose how rare such experiences will are.

(2) Before the rehearsal period of a

new children's play commissioned for Madder in South Australia I was flown to Adelaide to take part in discussions on set design, lighting, costumes and casting. This has never happened to me before in the preliminary stages.

(3) The Director of the Perth Playhouse upped my percentage for the season of a newly commissioned play on his own terms (from 8½% to 10%), on the grounds that a twice commissioned playwright deserves a slice more out of the final cake.

Counter examples in Melbourne: Jim Cotter, the composer's original music, was not used in the MTC production of *Mukungup*. They refused to pay his final asking fee of 3½%. All other professional companies paid him 4% for a complete musical score. The MTC at scandalously short notice decided to commission another composer at a much cheaper rate. The result was a big drop in the standard of the play.

There were other problems in Melbourne. The theatre was far too small to accommodate the world of *Mukungup*. The problems of the Opera House stage were used to great advantage in Sydney. In Melbourne the result was a cluttered production. The problems of marrying script to theatre are always major ones, particularly in Australia, where Australian plays are still too often relegated to the smaller spaces, irrespective of whether they suit the particular piece or not.

Music theatre has its own particular problems, and as most of my plays have been 'plays with music' (as separate from 'musicals') I've had considerable experience in this area. Many managements refuse to take the musical component seriously, many directors don't understand the use of music, many of the budgets make little if any accommodation for the composer of the musings. We all know the problems music tends to make the budget leap drastically, but a few actors playing a medley of musical instruments on stage is no substitute for even a small orchestra of professionals.

The woman playwright has a double struggle, as Australian and as a woman in a predominantly male structure. This is a very complex

question, but seems to boil down to the fact that women do have a point of view, a style, a sensibility, which has hardly touched the theatre in this country, and the theatre is the poorer because of it.

What would I like to see in the next few years? A still wider appreciation of differing styles of theatre (although this is improving), more time given to new scripts in reading, discussion and rehearsal, greater attention to matching director and script, script design and actual space, deeper understanding of the special needs of music theatre, and the involvement of the playwright in all areas of the production, as much as humanly possible.

From "dangling of the academics" to a popular success in most capitals has been a long step in one short year. Without the support of students, and academics, and earlier on, the student theatres themselves, I doubt if I'd have survived in the Australian theatre. I will always be grateful for that support and hope I'll continue to have it. I've got a strange feeling that the gap between so called "academic, poetic theatre" and a popular success is not so far off so deep anyway, and is largely still created by the conservatives and the darlings who can't see the wood for the trees.

Barry Oakley

"If playwrights could run a theatre of their own..."

What I would like to see, arising out of the Playwrights' Conference, is a theatre that would have writers in its structure and management — ie, a playwrights' theatre. There is a scene especially with the larger, more institutionalized theatres, that the writer is the supplier of no more than gull paste — which then goes through a series of sometimes impersonal processes to come out as a cake at the other end. If playwrights could run a theatre of their own there would probably be endless fights but the writer would at least be involved in the theatre structure, and not have the

haphazard and temporary relationship that he tends to have with managements of a more conventional kind.

David Allen

"It's nearly always the writer who cops the shit."

I think there are managements and directors who are open to all kinds of subjects and styles and will give you a fair go. We all know who they are and we all send them our work! I am increasingly aware, though, that the right director, cast and theatre is essential for the presentation of a script. If a play bombs it's nearly always the writer who cops the shit. That's because critics are writers of sorts as well.

I think that the state of playwriting is pretty healthy at the moment. New writers are springing up all the time and there are a lot of good new plays about. The director I'd like to see developing is the one whose scripts deal with Australian problems and concerns less parochially and on a broader canvas. We can't escape the world politically — we're all part of the universal angst.

John Romerill

"Fruits of the revolution not equally shared."

You could do worse than Currency Press's 1980 Book List as an object for scholarship. Whatever you concluded would have a certain validity because Currency doesn't just trade in the nation's dramatic literature, so a significant view of Currency's list is this nation's dramatic literature.

Arranged alphabetically by author the list carries a photograph of perhaps half the titles, and a blurb on most. Also listed are each play's

casting requirements.

Adding up always an undignified form of human labour, a something best left to a computer but I did my sums on 14 of the glossy brochure's 17 columns.

Of the Australian content this can be said if Currency's list is this nation's dramatic literature then this nation's dramatic literature has been erected on the backs of 138 male and 156 female characters in other words this nation's dramatic literature has created 182 more jobs for men than it has for women. A ratio of better (meaning worse) than 2 to 1. If the plays employ fewer women than men so does the press. Of the 35 writers listed in the sample, a third five were women, a ratio of 5 to 1.

Even more damning is that while these five women add 48 female parts to the national dramatic repertoire they enrich it to the tune of 50 parts for men. The 30 men on the other hand manage only 106 female parts for the 260 parts for men they've written. Thus one sex, it seems theatrically reflects socio-economic reality via all but equal numbers of men and women. The other reflects us Australia by marshalling the witness of men over women in a ratio of almost 3 to 1.

Vote la difference? Or why the difference?

In terms of stock, plant and productive capacity Currency Press is a real gain. Ten years of virtual cultural revolution have brought into being a press capable of keeping a large part of the nation's dramatic literature in print and before the public.

To suppose, however, that our cultural revolution has succeeded, or that it is finished, is wrong. As Currency's list shows the fruits of the revolution have not been shared equally by men and women. Thus the long march is far from over.

Errol Bray

"I think many directors are scared of writers."

(Errol Bray wrote in some detail about his experiences at Nimrod during rehearsals for *The Chew*. Other playwrights kept their complaints

more general, but if Bray's experience is at all common — and only other writers know whether it is — then it shows how important closer involvement of writers is.)

The problem lay in what I see as a general attitude in the theatre world that playwrights are somehow ignorant, untrained people who know nothing about theatre and little about life but happen to be lucky enough to scribble a few words that the truly creative people — directors, actors and administrators — can turn into saleable products. I think many directors are scared of writers and scared of admitting the basic creative importance of the playwright.

Having an iron-clad contract does not solve a playwright's problems. I had an excellent contract with Nimrod

one that paid me a full salary for four weeks of rehearsals and gave me great billing and a good percentage etc. However the reality is that taking a play away from a company is the only sanction or power a playwright has. How can you take your first play (or any play) away from a company with Nimrod's reputation? And where do you draw the line? Just because they treat you badly doesn't mean the production will be bad does it? Probably yes! Just because they change your play — despite a clause in the contract forbidding this — in several crucial spots doesn't mean the end result need be bad, does it? Probably yes!

When actors and a director change a script they don't have the creative responsibility for the overall script and structure. The writer should be entrusted with that but seems trusted very little at all. Neil made many changes to *The Chew* that I had protested vigorously about in rehearsal, giving detailed reasons why the changes would be bad — I was never allowed to say my creative intuition tells me so — and Neil made the changes in the final production week when I wasn't at rehearsal. His excuse was that the play wouldn't work as it was and some specific lines and actions "just wouldn't work." The play had worked in Canberra as a reading and Bryan Nason at TN Theatre had no problems in doing the whole play. It was exciting to see Bryan's production to see my whole

Continued on page 22.

The Politics of Playwriting

by John McCallum

Playwriting in Australia has suffered historically from a number of disadvantages. It began in a century when theatre was an actors' medium, and has developed, in this century, while theatre has become more and more a directors' medium. Add to this the Australian playwright's long alienation from the commercial stage, caused by the commercial management's uncynphonic reliance on over-stage plays, and what is surprising is not that Australian drama has developed so late, but that it has developed at all.

In the 19th century writers had virtually no influence on or reward from their plays at all, when they had been given (or sold for, say, 10/-) to the managers. Writers like George Darrell and Alfred Dampier, in the 1870s and 80s, overcame this only by being also their own leading actors, managers and often, theatre owners. In this century playwrights are protected legally from gross exploitation, but there has never been a time, in the history of Australian theatre, when playwrights have been given prime importance. There has never been a time, however brief, when playwrights could establish their role in the theatre, for later times to respect.

Recently playwrights have managed to get in by the back door. A rapidly growing theatre scene has, rather belatedly, discovered that it helps if writers are given a place somewhere. But they will have no real theatrical



Graham Shirley, former Director of the Playwrights' Guild of Australia, now a 'full professional' playwright.

power — only the rather useless right to withhold their scripts. Directors and theatre managers, with the box will in the world (which they don't always have), cannot allow playwrights the influence their contribution demands, the theatrical power structure being what it is. As a result Australian drama is still proceeding in fits and starts, talented playwrights are ignored, mediocre ones elevated, and those plays which do get on may be misinterpreted and misdirected. Writers are treated with condescension, arrogance and ignorance.

There is no reason why theatre

should not be, in different times, an actors' or directors' medium. The problem for writers is that here it has never been theirs.

There are, of course, many theatres and other charitable organisations which aim, quite sincerely, to help, guide, develop, foster, nurture or otherwise look after Australian playwrights. In the decade of minority movements, however, such outside charity is not enough. The first important organisation, therefore, in this sense of playwright politics, is the Australian Writers' Guild.

THE AWG

The recent relative maturity of the Writers' Guild is a sign of the new role Australian writers are seeking for themselves. The Guild's negotiation of new contracts, including a new Stage Contract, and bits of small-scale industrial action (over delays in the negotiation of a contract with the ABC, and over rates for the *Run-Play* tour programme with SBS in Adelaide, and its parent company NBN in Newcastle) indicates a flexing of muscles on the part of the writers. In particular the Stage Group of the Guild is concerned to counter the producers' that writers are by definition unskilled and incompetent in the ways of the theatre. They point to directors whose managerial deficiencies have caused problems in theatres, and to the dearth of good theatre managers generally, and ask

why writers should be singled out as the incompetent ones. They resent the old idea that writers are impractical gnomes' dreamers, which is still sometimes used as an excuse for keeping them off boards and out of positions of power.

THE ANPC

Some members of the Stage Group have recently been making a push into the Australian National Playwrights' Conference. The ANPC began eight years ago as another charitable organisation, designed to nurture new writers and encourage and help them in the development of their craft. Recently it has begun to swing over to writer-control. At the 1980 Annual General Meeting a motion was passed which made significant re-orientation of writers on the General Committee mandatory. Dramatists now must be writers and there is a move for the Artistic Director to be a writer. Again, the playwrights involved resist the notion that, being writers, they cannot run their own conference. The move is manifested in this year's Conference which places much more emphasis than before on "established" writers, and less on new writers. Of the eight plays to be workshopped, two are by writers in *Theatre Australia's* Top 15 — Dorothy Hewett and Alma de Groen — and another two by writers mentioned in the Guide — Cirm Gorman and Bob Herbert. From being a school for young playwrights the ANPC is becoming a self-run, fully professional Conference.

THE LITERATURE BOARD

Government subsidy, of course, is

one form of charity which most writers don't object to although they often object to the way in which it is administered. (Not too loudly, times being what they are.) In the last two years the Literature Board of the Australia Council has swung away from funding playwrights for work by themselves, and has begun the Writers-in-Residence scheme whereby they are encouraged to work in the busy-burly of real, live theatres. Whether this scheme will be a success, in the present theatrical power-structure, remains to be seen, but it raises questions of how public money can best be distributed.

Playwriting competitions. These were very popular in the 50s (when playwrights first began to be seriously patronised) which ought to be a sign that they don't work. The recent wondrous competition run by the Queensland Theatre Company, in which the "poor" money was in effect an advance against royalties should have put an end to them now.

Living Allowances, Fellowships, etc. These at least free writers from financial worries (up to a point) and allow them to get on with their work. Unfortunately they also tend to widen the gap between writers and the theatre — writing them aside outside the companies they are supposed to be working for.

Writers-in-Residence Schemes. This obviously overcomes the above problem — although, again, only up to a point. The dangers for writers in theatre companies which expect special rights to work produced during the residency, or expect extra, unpaid work — playreading, hot-pot acting,

etc. At present the short periods of the grants (up to 6 months) do not allow writers to develop a full working relationship with a company, but at least they are in the theatres. Too many writers, however, find that they dash their residency, present a script, and see it go the way of all the unproduced scripts they had sent before. For this reason the scheme might be combined more closely with...

Commissions. For a long time these were popular, but notoriously useless for the writers, except as small additional sources of income. The trouble was that there used to be no guarantee, or even likelihood, of production of the completed play. (One well-known playwright received a commission in the early '70s from the U.N.S.W. Drama Foundation — partly responsible for the Jane Street Australian Play Seasons — and had the final play rejected and sent back with some undergraduate "Notes for Playwrights" to guide him in his future efforts! Similar stories abound.)

Now useful commissions seem to be becoming common, partly because the playwrights themselves have greater stature (*Big River*, *Celluloid Heroes*, *The Man From Marloway* etc.) If this sort of respect for playwrights carried through into the general artistic management of our theatres, then playwrights would have a lot less to complain about. With some sort of qualified guarantee of production commissions are obviously a way of also strengthening the Writers-in-Residence scheme and making the experience much more productive for the writer.

THEATRE BOARD

The Theatre Board of the Australia Council, a statutory body of the Commonwealth Government, is pleased to continue its financial support of the Australian National Playwrights Conference (\$19,568 in 1981), a support it has maintained since 1974. This support underlines the importance the Board attaches to the development of Australian playwrights which it considers to be one of its most important priorities.

A New Era

Katharine Brisbane looks at the Playwright in the '80s



After "Mourning in Mourning" (left) with Miss Fanny McLaughlin — a major influence upon the theatre of the 19th. Photo: David Hill/Arca

While I was working on the editing of Peter Hollaway's *Contemporary Australian Drama* a collection of critical writing which has taken four years to put together, I took it for granted that we were in the middle of an ongoing rush of theatrical activity and radical change on which we had to impose some balance and perspective.

Looking at it now, all those playwrights and critical passions between covers, it somehow makes manifest the end of an era.

The book opens with a mystical prologue by Douglas Stewart, in which he talks of literature — and play-writing — "creating" a nation. "The playwright," he says, "creates the myths by which the people live." And he ends by saying "The play of the soul after the poetic drama, is what I am myself most anxious to see, for though of course I would welcome a city comedy, it seems to me that the kind of distillation of the search which we get in the plays of Synge and Chekhov is what is most previously overdue in Australia."

That was 1955. The epilogue given to Jack Hibberd, a gloomy piece which asks what are we doing and why. "With the burgeoning of an indigenous theatre and the open nationalism of the Whitlam period, we thought we had the real makings of a national culture of 'identity'." A sober and astute realist, has returned. Hopes have been curtailed. Hence the stasis, the calm. Hence the dream subterranean feeling that the bulk of the work is still to be done, that we are almost back where we started.

He adds that the setback to our hopes may prove beneficial and ends with a paragraph as stirring as Sydney Barrett's election speech in Eason's *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* enumerating Australia's needs. "We need," Hibberd concludes, "an awful lot. But are we in the mood?" Back in 1912 Barrett concluded the public was not in the mood.

Let us hope Hibberd's cudgels will be taken up by the next generation.

The fact is, of course, that we are all 15 years older than we were when the first tentative ripples of the new wave leaped the back streets of Melbourne and Sydney. There was revolution to be waged and in spirit the creation of a new independent nation. Since then Douglas Stewart has had his plays of

the soul, his poetic drama and his city comedies — sometimes all three in the same work. But I doubt they were the kind of plays he expected or particularly welcomed.

For it is the clown and the clown among our writers, not the idealists, that in the last decade have created, or rather revealed, the myths by which people live, and they have done it with a sangrity that no previous generation has dared. It has been a cleansing operation, holding up to the light the secrets of the Australian character, its poetry, sentimentality, gallantry and vulgarity. For ours is a comic spirit and only in humour is the underlying tragedy honestly revealed. Take the rebellious Sally Harner in *The Chapel Perilous* being greeted by reporters at the end of her lifelong search for immortality.

CHORUS: What are your plans for the future?

SALLY: Cremation.

Or Sandy Stone's last words,



Mos Def O'Neil: 'I don't see dog'

summing up the vivifications of his small, weird life.

The Harp is clearing while I sleep.
Or Monk O'Neil, the misanthropic hermit of *A Sketch of the Imagination*.

A man's best friend is his dog. That

woman cannot attain the high standard of companionship afforded by the dumb canine. A man. His God. A man. I shot my dog.

Such images are the myths by which we live.

The greatest contribution the playwrights of the '70s have made to the creation of our nation is the elevation of the Australian language. So great has been their success that, in the natural course of things, we no longer listen as we used. The playwright in 1981 is not the leader of thought that he was in 1973. The director and actor are reasoning themselves — or asserting, in the case of the actor. The same is right for an actors' revolution.

I do not mean that the playwright's discovery of the vernacular was new. It runs through the history of our theatre older by far than plays like *Rough Sugar* or *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. But before 1960 it was enmeshed in a structure that was foreign — adapted, true, but foreign. Genre comedy, melodrama, burlesque, social realism, Expressionism, we have them all. And it is also true that there are links in Baro's early working with Pinter and Longue, in Hubbard's with Beckett, in Hewitt's with O'Neil and Tennessee Williams. And so on. But what all these writers have done — most notably Williamson who on the surface may appear a straightforward realist writer — is allow the ways in which the characters express themselves to dictate the shape of the play.

Through the labours of such writers we achieved a theatre most truly in accord with the Australian consciousness than any since the end of



Sandy Stone: The Island. An increasing number of male writers putting a woman in the leading role. Photo: Peter Holderness.

the last century when commercial melodrama was tuned continually by actors in response to their audience.

As the 1970s progressed two things happened: the playwrights wanted to run out of puff and the audience stopped responding to the shock of the new. The causes were several, partly the shock was not new any more, partly the changed political climate no longer stimulated the public to change or action, partly the comfortable new theatres were less demanding of action by playwrights, actors and audience and less stimulating to the imagination than the old makeshift ones. Spartan conditions, once an adventure, now assumed a lower status.

Meanwhile what of the new playwrights?

I think it is symptomatic of the new decade of writers that so many are turning to historical fact for inspiration, not in the mood of indignant self-exposure of ten years ago but as a kind of defence against that sort of theatre. The plays seem to reveal a need to act at a distance what they want to say about Australia — again a reactionary move against the kind of eye-of-the-beholder that characterised early Williamson, Noonan and Hubbard. Louis Nowra, David Allen, George Hincham, Rob George, Stephen Sewell and Roger Pulvers are examples of this kind of writer: writers in themselves very different from one another. Of these Nowra and Pulvers are most personal in their writing. Their characters inhabit a landscape entirely their own and they have made a thesis of their need to place at a distance the barbarity of this world. Looked at dispassionately a new intellectual kind of cruelty is creeping into our theatre, a cruelty that has not been there before, because it points the finger of accusation at the audience.

"The biggest clue in all my plays," Williamson once said disarmingly, "is always me."

A second quality the new writers have in common — and here I would add Errol Bray to the list — is the need to be didactic. Faced with a public inert and self-satisfied, supplied with a variety of theatre cranked ten years ago, they are sometimes impatient with the dramatic means of discovery and want to shake some caring. It is a characteristic of the new work that it

often has a figure step out of the action to express the views of the author.

As with the earlier wave, form has proved initially more innovative than content. Audiences are captured by the spectacular visual effects of Nowra's work, the marcher canons of Barry Dickson, the halleluic rhymes of Hutchinson's *Vo Rouse for Drovers*, the brutality of Sewell's *Fravars* and Bray's *The Chow*. A significant advance has been the way such plays can become the vehicle for a director.

The playwrights of the late 70s not only invented new forms but had to create the theatres and the acting style to perform them. There is still some pioneering work going on but today promising writers have the facilities of the National Playwrights Conference, agencies, TV commissions, and once a theatre takes up a play, all the money and imagination that theatre can afford will be lavished on it. It may not be the production they want, their advice may not be heeded. On the other hand the production may exceed all their expectations. Either way they cannot say they have gone unnoticed.

The theatre has grown out of all recognition and we must thank God



Stephen Sewell's *Fravars*. Among those who want to shake us into caring. Photo: John Dillmore

for that. But, as Hubbard says, we still need an awful lot.

So what of the 80s?

The new form that may persuade us to listen again is music theatre. Music has permeated the theatre in the past decade, particularly in the work of Hubbard, Hewitt and Nowra. And the demise of the J.C.W. musical production opens the field to indigenous work as never before.

The recent success of Hewitt's *The Man from Mulungup* in Sydney is significant. Since she left the New Fortune in Perth she has not found till now an environment to encompass her dense and free-flowing style. Her preoccupation with poetry and music has been inconvenient to management, not to mention her insistence upon taking female sexuality seriously. I foresee that Dorothy Hewitt will be a major influence upon the theatre of the 80s because her work reflects the times. An increasing number of recent plays by male writers have had women in the leading role. Sally Bunn has begun to look less intimidating.

It follows that the same is also open for other women playwrights. Doeren Clarke's unconscious exposure of the exploited female in bringing her deserved success. And there will be others.

What of the older writers? Or have we closed the book on 'contemporary' Australian drama? In a way we have. The theatre must keep changing. Some writers will change with it, some will not. Some may disappear and return to the theatre a decade later like Patrick White did, when he felt the need.

The 70s produced at least three great plays and a dozen more in the first rank. That is an extraordinary record for any country. Times have changed. If *The Rover* were had its premiere today it would be received very differently, possibly with hostility. It is foolish to expect our writers to remain the same — or to blame them if they do so. We should simply honour them for their part in the creation of a nation. To have written one good play is enough to deserve such honour.

But the history of the theatre is a history of fashion. And in fashion there is little respect, or progress. Only change.

Theatre Australia's Guide To Playwrights

ALEX RUZO



When, with a dry, brittle, witty style, which he uses sensitively to explore personal moral dilemmas of his characters. "Some people claim not to be able to see past the style — a view they must have to place their eyes a lot to sustain. He has come a long way since *Norm and Alvin* (1968), *Reverie* (1969) and *The Front Room Boys* (1969), which were welcomed as part of the "new vernacular school" of the late 60s. From *Conrad Lawless or Two's No!* (1974) on he showed that he wasn't that interested in vernacular and colours after all — but some reviewers got left behind. Audiences didn't, and *Matrillo Towers* (1976), *Melbourne Brief* (1976) and *the River* (1980) have continued to draw them in. Other plays: *The Fox Mermaid Show* (1970), *Magazine* (1972), *Tom* (1972), *Run man! Run Alvin!* (1973), *High Mountain Clocks* (1979) and *Cliff* (1981).

DOROTHY HEWITT



Has an incredible world inside her head, and a lot of it seems to be coming out. She

writes hauntingly lyrical explorations of a sometimes very personal past, combining it somehow with a healthy sense of the cosmic significance of personal incidents and dramas, and with a love for flashy theatricality — so much that some people (critics) included) claim her plays are "difficult". She has shown, in *The Old Man Comes Rolling Home* (1968) and *The Beautiful Mrs Portman* (1976) that she is perfectly capable of more straightforward plays. (Significantly, though, these two are the least often performed.) Plays: *Mrs Porter And Her Angel* (1966), *The Chapel Perilous* (1971), *Ben-Hur and Rains for Deth* (1972), *The Tenth Wolfen Skin* (1974), *Joan* (1975), *The Golden Child* (1976), *Paradise's Cross* (1978), *The Man From Madrasnapur* (1979), *Satanstoe's Dreaming* (1980).

JACK HIBBERD



Is in the odd position of having written both Australia's greatest ever popular success, *Greencoat* (1968), and greatest literary-academic success, *Servant of the Imagination* (1972), as well as one of the most influential early plays of the "new vernacular school" *White Wash Wine Warms* (1967). He is well-known for advocating a "rich, relevant and risky" "popular" theatre dealing with national heroes in plays like *A Toast To Myths*

(1978). To continue the paradoxes, though, he also draws on the entire Western cultural tradition to feed his energetic nationalism. Other plays: *One Of Nature's Gracelings* (1966), *Three Old Friends* (1968), *White* (1968), *Just Before the House was* (1968), *Clay* (1969), *The Last Days of Eps J Remorse* (1969), *Clay* (1970), *Contents and Errors* (1970), *Proud Flesh* (1970), *Meris* (1971), *Women* (1972), *Captain Midnight P.C.* (1972), *The Les Girls Show* (1974), *Peggy Sue* (1974), *The Chorus* (1976), *A Man Of Many Parts* (1980).

JOHN ROMERIL



Our leading writer-theorist, his theory leads him to assert his commitment in any show to that of humble fellow-worker — so although he is Australia's most prolific playwright he has only one generally acknowledged "major" play *The Floating World* (1974). He is the most serious analysis of contemporary political, social and economic data on stage, and one of the most entertaining. Plays: *A Nervous Comedy* (1968), *Mr & the Big Big Pig* (1968), *The American Independence House* (1968), *Acquaintance Table* (1969), *I Don't Know Who To Feel Sorry For* (1969), *Chicago* (1969), *Dr Karl's Kiss* (1970), *Mr. Death* (1971), *200 Years* (1971), *Dr Spock* (1971), *Wingspread* (1971), *Brudner Rumpkin*

(1971), *Barbaric* (1972), *Mr Can Suggest Sitting Down* (1972), *The Radioactive Horror Show* (1973), *On All You Want To* (1978), *Melons* (1979), *Cashmere* (1980), *The Good War* (1980), *The 200 000* (1980), *With Jack Hibberd*, *Martello's Melbourne* (1980).

DAVID WILLIAMSON



Has such a successful, coherent body of work that people tend to use him, wrongly, as a model to describe the development of drama in the 70s. A sort of dramatic pluralist, he is working his way through various important Australian sub-cultures, analysing and exploring them. He is the writer the most completely in touch with his audience, perhaps because of his satirical and bawdy half celebratory, half satirical. He has become a great writer of realistic comedy, and perhaps because he has been praised so much for that, he has allowed a great writer to become partly submerged in the process. Much loved. Has never written a better play. *The Coming of Breed* (1970), *The Remains* (1971), *Don't Put It* (1971), *Angels Three* (1972), *When Of You And Tomorrow* (1973), *The Department* (1974), *A Handful of Friends* (1976), *The Club* (1977), *Travelling North* (1979), *Enthralled Women* (1980).

ALMA DE GROEN

She's tough. Reviewers have complained that she isn't sympathetic enough to her characters, but knowing them you wouldn't want to be. She is so important once. Plays include: *The Swagproof Boy* (1972), *The Jazz Atlanta Show* (1972), *Going Home* (1973), *Charles* (1977).

THOMAS KENEALLY

Keeps heading back into the theatrical kitchen from the remoteness of the novelist's attic, and surprising people with his good narrative sense. Knows some good stories. *Holloran's Little Boat* (1966), *Childeham* (1968), *An Awful Power* (1972), *Baker's House* (1980).

PETER KENNA

A great survivor. At his best he writes truthfully and personally about the transience of values and the difficulties of living. *The Daughters of St Teresa's Day* (1959) stood out among the "ham realist" plays for its Irish energy and loose, relaxed structure. *A Hard God* (1973) is one of the most moving of all Australian plays. Others include: *Talk To The Moon* (1970), *Loose Church* (1972), *Mares* (1975), *Parade Lane* (1978), *An Eagle Hope* (1978).

RAY LAWLER



Showed up the bush legend for what it was with *Summer Of The Sirocco* (1955) but has never written as

convincingly about more recent realities. A great craftsman, and deservedly included in every Australian theatrical kit-bag. *The Paralytic Bushman* (1958), *The Man Who Shot The Athavan* (1971), *And Sooner* (1975), *Other Times* (1976).

LOUIS NOWRA



Another paradox. He writes with a rich theatrical imagination, has a graceful, epic, fast-moving narrative style, is confident and erudite and yet the overall effect is surprisingly austere. He has a flair for startling images and juxtapositions. Plays: *Others Visions* (1967), *Inner Visions* (1973), *Passion* (1976), *Inside The Island* (1980), *The Portents* (1980).

BARRY OAKLEY



Dangerous, irrelevant, witty. It is a sign of the prejudices

of theatrical management that *Boys Boys* (1975) is his best known play. He writes seriously and sympathetically about how bureaucracy and engineered idealism can take the fun out of life. Plays include: *The First of Daniel Moore* (1971), *Life and of Demotions* (1972), *Chaparral Sea* (1974), *The Ship's Wife* (1976), *Marsupials* (1979), *Solomon* (1980).

STEPHEN SEWELL



Makes the best use of two good plays and a lot of prompts. *The Father He Loved On A Sea in St. The Sea* (1970) and *Travellers* (1979) showed that he could place individual human feelings and actions in a broad historical and political context and have each finding the other.

PATRICK WHITE

Has suffered a lot because he's a Tall Poppy and because people think he doesn't like them. Reviewers complained 15 years ago that he was too difficult and mixed styles too much. He came back in 1977 with a more conventionally structured play, with an aristocrat as subject, and they turned round and said it was too straightforward. One of Australia's most influential playwrights in the '60s, his great vision is often ignored these days, by small minds. *The Man From Snowy Mountains* (1961), *The Season at Sarsaparilla* (1962), *A Chance of Soul* (1963), *Night On Bald Mountain* (1964), *Big Time* (1977).

DAVID ALLEN

Profile, fast working. Brought English theatre very interested in Australians with Australia. He finds good little veins of his own in the dramatic coal-mines, and works them with sound professional theatrical knowledge. Plays include: *Going With Words* (1977), *Upstairs Downstairs At The Bottom Of The World* (1979), *Joseph Conrad Goes Ashore* (1979). One day he'll be able to write "Conrad Ashore".

RON BLAIR



Has never had the influence the range and scope of his work suggests he ought. A dramatic boxer-bird, his comedy looks a bit like Marx's pawn shop. *Flash And Blues* (1971), *Novels On Fire* (with Michael Boddy, 1971), *President Wilson in Paris* (1973), *The Christian Brothers* (1975), *Mad Bad And Dangerous To Know* (1976), *Mare* (1978), *Love Day at Woodhouse* (1979) — an odd mixture of styles and subjects. Writes great parts for actors.

THE REST

MICHAEL BODDY

A great source of fun in the early '50s with *The Legend of King O'Malley* (with Bob Ellis 1950), *Bugsy* (with Ellis, Blair and Co., 1959), *Monks on Ice* (with Blair, 1951), and others. Later, wrote shows for Sydney's Mallet Hall, including *Last For Power*, as, *Perils of Parnassus* (1977).

MICHAEL COVE



Well known as a television writer, he also writes smooth craftsmanlike plays for the stage, with a distinctive line in dry wit. *Amalabara* (1975), *Jessie* (1974), *The Gals* (1976), *Hoppy Landings* (1978).

BARRY DICKENS



Has not yet had much influence outside Melbourne. Colossal, a really comic, undisciplined plays about good Aussie economic going mad on lonely huts etc. *Brickie Suez* (1978), *Fish's Shoe Moe!* (1979), *The Banana Bender* (1980).

BOB ELLIS

Australia's oldest writer seriously. A great collaborator. He writes terrific lines, but needs help stringing them together. *O'Malley* (with Boddy, 1950), *The Duke of Edinburgh Assassinated* (with Dick Hall, 1951), *Down Under* (with Anne Brooksbank, 1975). When writing all by himself he has, at least, superb timing. opened *The James Brown* (1973) the day after William was ticked, and *A Few Good Years* (1980) the day John Lennon was shot.

BOB HERBERT

Has been writing for a long time, but typically had to wait until his plays were not-a-good-perfect before he was discovered. Now *No Name No Park, Dad!* (1975) has shown that his brand of realistic comedy-drama is far from dead. A few laughs, a few tears.

GEORGE HUTCHINSON



Great success with *No Route for Dreamers* (1978), his vision of historical figures to make legends out of them, and uses a range of stylistic devices which other writers ignore.

JIM MCNEIL

Hope influence through school and university courses, and through Currensey's enthusiasm. Wrote beautiful studies of relationships while in prison, then ran passionate outburst, *Jay!* (1977) when he got out. *The Chinaman Frog* (1977), *The Old Familiar Face* (1977), *How Does Your Garden Grow* (1978).

RODNEY MILGATE

Like White he was an

outsider when it wasn't fashionable, then came back with a very conventional play when it was. *A Reflected Look at Australia* (1966), *At Least You Got Something Out Of This* (1968), *The Golden Performer in Europe* (1979).

ROGER PULVERS



Uncompromising, intellectual outlook — he explores the political reality of his times, drawing on what must be, in this country, a unique combination of international cultural influences. Plays include *Formaldehyde* (1977), *Cubano* (1978), *World Conference on Business Areas* (1978), *Brookly Street Faces Los Angeles* (1979).

BILL REED

Difficultated Need Reed-ford. He's taken to writing a few like that's *Black's Company* (1967), *Truganora* (1970), *Mr Sigger Marrow and his Comb and Paper* (1972), *You Want It Don't You Bob?* (1975), *Can Berber Boring* (1977).

ALAN SEYMOUR



One of the best known of the 'thirties' of the '50s although he has written other plays in other styles. Was a strong advocate for local Australian drama, dealing with local themes, before he left the country to live in London. In

spirit of his other writing, his reputation in this country will rest on *The One Day Of The Year* (1968). Others include *Swamp Country* (1957), *James Johnson* (1960), *A Road to The Moon* (1968), *Strangers* (1974), *The Floor* (1980).

STEVE J SPEARS



The huge success of *The Absence of Benjamin Franklin* (1976), in this country of shallow passing criticisms, probably means that anything he wrote after was bound to be ignored. He's hip, sometimes facile, but always theatrical and lively, and has a refreshing interest in colourful, unusual subjects. *Young Mr* (1973), *There Were Girls in Those Days* (1976), *King Richard* (1977), *The Death of George Akerley* (1979).

The 27 writers listed above are a formidable group, and there are more! There is no shortage of competent playwrights. Some of the following might have made the above list — all have had at least one success, and all have something to offer.

Linda Anderson, Helmut Bakula, Richard Blackburn, Errol Bray, Mona Brand, Dennis Clarke, Syd Clayton, Jennifer Compton, Mary Gage, Rob George, Tim Gooding, Clem Gorman, Ken Hamersley, Alan Hoggood, Simon Hopkinson, Robert Martin, Edgar Metcalfe, Phil Monaharrell, Ted Nether, John O'Donoghue, Mill Perrow, Ken Ross, Matt Rutherford, Bill Stewart.

Square a thought too for Jennifer Rankin, a pilot writer who turned to the stage but who died tragically young. Her play *Inv* (1976) was the first play ever published by Theatre Australia.


Important Organisations

The Australian Writers' Guild. The playwrights' registered trade union. In these militant times all professional stage, screen and TV writers should belong. Writers who have never had a professional production may join as Associate Members, and receive many of the benefits. Write to: Angela Wales, AWG, Suite 505, 83 York Street, Sydney, 2000.

The Australian National Playwrights Conference. Helps new and established

writers, mainly by workshopping and reading new scripts at an annual conference in Canberra in May. Write for details to: The Administrator, ANPC, 8/36 Clarence Street, Sydney, 2000.

The Australia Council. The Literature Board administers a range of grants to writers, chiefly, now, by subsidising Writers-in-Residence. Write to: The Secretary, Literature Board, Australia Council, PO Box 302, North Sydney, 2060.



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|---|---|--|--|--|---|--|

See Local Press for Booking Details.

From page 23.

play for the first time and to see just how well as a dramatic structure it did work.

Ironically, *The Choir* is a play about the way institutions diminish people and make them powerless. I felt diminished as a person and as a playwright by my experience with Nimrod. I am made powerless by their reputation — a reputational reason for the achievements of people like John Bell and Richard Wharmett — and many playwrights would be made powerless by the fear that Nimrod and other major companies might not produce any more of their plays if they stir trouble. I have the same fear but the experience was so dreadful and humiliating that I feel I must speak out about it. I also took some action about the chopping around of my script by refusing permission for the Nimrod production to go to Adelaide — a fairly enormous financial and artistic slip.

It's not all gloom, of course. Bryan Nason and the TN Company in Brisbane did an excellent and true

production of *The Choir* which was also artistically better in every way than the Nimrod production. TN's treatment of me as a playwright at all

levels of contact was wonderful. I felt really exhilarated by the experience of seeing my play done well and with enthusiasm and integrity.

ON CRITICS

Dorothy Hewett

Reviews in Australia are a mystery to me, with a few honourable exceptions, and yet I believe that the critic should be an integral part of the theatre — with a wide and educated working knowledge. We all need good, informed, positive criticism, but not the personal prejudices and lack of insight of the average reviewer in Australia.

Barry Oakley

Quality reviewing is essential for an intelligent climate of awareness. Only one or two newspaper or magazine reviewers are capable of putting a play in a theatrical context, seeing it, for example, in terms of our own emergent tradition, the contemporary theatre scene generally, and the European tradition. These are like conscientious critics, and a reviewer should bring this implicit awareness to

every play, and test every play against it. Most of them have only one criterion — is it entertaining? Is it a good night out? A good play is a good night out, but it's a lot more as well.

David Allen

No writer ever thinks they've been reviewed fairly, surely? And there are critics and critics! There is no doubt in my mind however — particularly in the incalcitrant cultural community where I am at the moment based — that the power of the review is immense. And it doesn't matter who has written it! If it says there is black and white that the play is bad, nobody goes. The danger is a place where cultural politics is a vital element in the personal prestige game so that merit becomes less important than trend or acceptability, social or otherwise.

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INTERN



A great clown in an hour of need

by Irving Wardle

Not possessing a television set, I am always discovering wonderful new stage talents which have been known for years to the viewing masses, but even I was vaguely aware of the name of Rowan Atkinson as the star of a BBC comedy series called *Nor The Nor O'Clock, Nor* which lately carried off a Silver Rose at Montreux. From what I could glean from incoherently giggling descriptions, typical Atkinson sketches included a venomous roll-call by a prep school potan ("Clapham Ellsworth-Boss Major Ellsworth-Boss Minor F Koff. Come on - grow up Noble Orville Fleckum - put us on a Fleckum etc.") and the laudatorial cross of a leather-

clad punk desperately trying to find the right tip.

None of this prepared me for the sight of Rowan Atkinson in *Revue* (Globe), which recently opened for a three-month season that was booked out by the end of the first week. With some musical backing and a few loud lines from his two self-offering partners, Mr Atkinson holds the stage for two and a half hours in the most brilliantly sustained display of solo comedy that has yet come my way. One thing he does not deserve is his recent nomination as BBC Television Personality of the Year, for, judging from the Globe show, he has no continuous personality whatever. The whole thing is done through facial masks behind which the essential Atkinson, if such a creature exists, remains wholly concealed.

His physique imposes some limitations. With his slight figure and sharp elfish features, he is right outside the standard range of the burly British comedian. But where others generally specialise as victims or aggressors, Atkinson is as much in his element as a top dog as an underdog; as he

is in watching him scripted material to wordless pantomime. The open bulge, the mouth twists into a bloated leer, the shoulders rise up to his ears — and there is

a pain-stricken best man who has forgotten his speech, a modest father trying to get his trunk on before he has taken his trousers off (and succeeding), or a Deep Southern M.C. introducing a mixed programme ("It's either finger-bakin' good or am-wa-gin' bad").

As you will note from this list, there is nothing very startling about his choice of subjects, all of which could have appeared in *Around the Fringe* 20 years ago, and some of which did. Shakespearean production remains, for one, which Atkinson illustrates as a black-faced chorus boy in hot lights, giving as a bonus long with one physical defect, followed by a fringe long with two physical defects, followed by messengers bringing good and bad news, and finally a messenger who thinks he is bringing good news until he unrolls the scroll.

What has changed in English comedy (and this also goes for John Cleese's *grotesque*) is the enthusiasm with which ideas are worked out. Atkinson gets to the expected climax and then keeps on building. In his wedding party sketch, the bride's father leads up to a carefully prepared snarl to the bridegroom and then goes on until he has insulted everyone else in the room and the waiting firm to which he is paying a bomb. Playing the David languidly welcoming new arrivals, he starts with adulations ("over there, by that small gentleman") and attacks ("you must be feeling a touch of right Charles"), and then goes on to make a clean sweep of Americans and Christians ("I'm afraid the Jews were right").

This kind of thing is supported by following physical actions through, like the adventures of a tin can tied to a dog's tail. If he sweeps the stage and empties the dust into his shoe, it is certain that, on exit, he will wonder what's wrong with his foot and empty the dust out again. If, lacking a handkerchief, he blows his nose in his pocket lining, it is only a matter of time before he thoughtfully smuggles a sweet into the same pocket.

Some people have labelled this side of the show as schoolboy humour. To which you can only agree: while also observing that it will blow the roof off the theatre, that Atkinson can equally pick off adult targets in a couple of lethal gestures (the evoked Margaret Thatcher with a scolded handshake and a knee to the groin), and

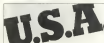


Rowan Atkinson in *Revue*. Photo: Jean Mitchell

ATIONAL

than he is never feebler than when he is just standing there, mouth shut, not moving a muscle. In our hour of need we have found a great clown.

Brian Friel's *Frank Heeler* (Royal Court) assembles three fine actors (Patrick Magee, Helen Mirren, Stephen Lewis) in the service of a cryptic fable about an Irish homecoming Frank, the Irish healer, flees with a judge's daughter, acquiesces to a co-sharecropper manager, and spends the next 20 years playing his steadily failing gift around the Scottish and Welsh homeland until poverty and actual warfare drive the one back to Donegal, where miraculously his gift returns just before he falls victim to a tactfully unperfected death squad. I take this to be an allegory on the artist's life, showing two ordinary people totally devoted to a hero who cares only for his expressive gift, which may help to explain why Mr Friel sabotaged his story by telling it in the form of four garrulous retrospective monologues including one by a dead man. Remember William Holden at the end of *Starry Starry Night*? "I let the water, and I didn't come up again."



Ladies in waiting

by Karl Lervitt

Of late on the stages of Broadway and Off Broadway it has definitely been Ladies' Day at the Hippodrome. The prohibition of vehicles for women has been matched by several outstanding performances by actresses - that leads to the breaking suspicion that at the moment in New York theatre, the ladies certainly have the edge over their male counterparts.

Five very worthy female performances were on display at the recent Hudson Guild's production of John Murrell's *Waiting for the Parade*. The play is a series of scenes and monologues describing how five women survived the Second World War in Mr Murrell's home town of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Four of the women work in a Red Cross Centre, the fifth waits for the release of her German-



Roberta Murrell as Mary Stuart at the Public Theatre. Photo: James Cook

born father from a Canadian internment camp.

The spouse of women living their lives through men, whom we come to know but never see, is neatly presented by Mr Murrell. In material of this sort, the risk of soap, opera excess is ever present but the playwright skates over that thin ice with just sufficient weight. Much of the play's humour is gained by Mr Murrell's affectionate denial in showing the women's painfully current attempts at the Red Cross Centre to be part of the distant war. For many Australian women these scenes would be quickly recognised as being very

close to their own experiences during WWII. The authenticity of these scenes provides a much-needed supporting framework for this fragmented play.

Mr Murrell must also be credited with creating five full-bodied women's parts. With equal opportunity for all, probably Rosanne Barr's unfeeling Catherine and Maria Murrell's bossy Janet stand out. (Both these actresses were in last year's BAM Company and boy, are they really missed.) Jo Henderson as the German's daughter and last sect at the harried mother in *Ladyhouse Blues* is suddenly younger and charmingly elegant. Such minor theatrical ruses are always a pleasure.

The ill-fated Mary, Queen of Scots is a lady who has long fascinated creative artists. The latest version (and certainly the most curious) is *Mary Stuart* by the German playwright and novelist, Wolfgang Iltis. Iltis, Mr Murrell's friend, is new to me but from the programme I see that he was born in 1916, has published several novels and two collections of plays (all in German) and translated as the Harzburg trials. He also has a most original vision of history as well as a playful sense of playwriting. On the strength of *Mary Stuart*, translators and directors might quickly look to his other works.

Mr Iltis should be grateful to the Dodger Theatre's production of *Mary Stuart* at the Public Theatre. The Dodger Theatre group is one of the few New York theatre companies that has a feeling for



Branka Balazs as Alice's sister

ensemble playing, plus a depth of variety in its character actors. The playwright should also be grateful to having Roberta Maxwell as Mary, in a performance that puts her in the forefront of New York actresses.

Here Mary is the lady in waiting — for her own husband. The play starts slowly in Mary's dungeon cell and for quite a time it seems we're watching a rather tedious historical drama about a queen and her retainers. Then members of the royal household trickle in, the Queen drinks a poison, suddenly the action is speeded up and a flurry of acrobatic scenes is telescoped into the next hour. As the queen is drugged for her execution, makeshift break-downs. There's a scorching robbery, singing, several forms of farcicalisation, a parade of stilled dogs, religious conversions, murder, an Anglican prayer of damnation — and finally the execution.

Several of the New York critics labelled the play 'absurdism' in catch-all (if ever I heard one). Actually the play is totally logical, within its framework of telescoped time and heightened reality. It is a capsule of human nastiness and you feel almost giddy for laughing at so much of it.

And in the midst of all these disconcerting dirty deeds, there's Mary who as she is ritually dressed as Queen, becomes one before our eyes. As if by an act of Royal Will, Roberta Maxwell keeps the play focused on her, even while the wildest diatribes are happening on every side. And she even suggests pathos in the play's final moments. A remarkably skilful performance. After *Anders* and *Seven* and now *Mary Stuart*, Roberta Maxwell can go right to the top of the class.

With *Lolita*, Edward Albee's dramatization of the Nabokov novel, it is we who have done the waiting. While elements captured and the producer faced money problems, the opening night reeled into the future (The real reason, it is said, was Albee's consistent revisions of the second act).

Said to report, then, that after all that effort with Act II, Albee still couldn't get it right. What is wrong with the play is what will always be wrong with trying to squeeze a complex and multi-levelled novel into a night at the theatre. The start is promising with the two comically naive (old cheeks of Nabokov's play wordplay here). The play goes along nicely until the bedding of Lolita, just after intermission. Frank Dunlop's best directorial bit so far was in the delicious funeral scene, complete with walk background and an aching Charlotte rising from the coffin.

Right about then, the novel changes gear, but the play stays on its early track. Nabokov's scene of Humbert's visit to the pregnant Lolita is laden with pathos, here it seemed determined to be comic and

oddly unimportant. Albee's *Lolita* has made a brave attempt to be like Nabokov's *Lolita* — all things to all people — but there just isn't time in the two hours' traffic of the stage.



Rebecca Hill, Marge Redmond, Mary Martin and Mia Farrow in Waiting For The Parade

One Albee device is to have Nabokov as narrator (tongue called *A Certain Gentleman*). This allows Humbert someone to talk to about his inner desires, but in the *Random Digest* version taken over in the second act, our *Certain Gentleman* almost

gets the gate. As this is Ian Richardson, one of the English-speaking world's better actors, it's disconcerting to see him looking his best on the seldom-winning for another opportunity to get a word in. Donald Sutherland is Humbert Humbert and if he isn't quite the European gentleman everyone says he is, he does have flair, presence and a real line in comic passion.

Lolita is Blanche Baker, a 24-year-old actress who can look like a teenager, but always acts like a grown-up and clever actress. A tricky part and she handles it with a firmness that requires a lot of the awkwardness inherent in the material. Clive Revill is also on hand as Clare Quilty, but the part is reduced practically to cameo roles that then seem overstated. No doubt there's a lot of talent involved with *Lolita*. It seems, however, as if nobody has learnt that a great novel cannot be learnt to pulp.

As well as these invited ladies, on Broadway there are two new English imports: Jane Lapogona as *Paul* and Glenda Jackson as *Rose*. These are about to be joined by Lauren Bacall in the musical *Born on the Fourth of July* (based on the old *Happen-Tracey* film). Finally, Elizabeth Taylor will be weighing in with *The Little Foxes*. Yes, definitely Ladies' Day at the Broadway ballpark. Perhaps the men should stay home and clean up their act.

ITI

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19TH BIENNIAL STATUTORY ITI
CONGRESS will be held in Madrid 30
May to 6 June 1981 with the theme of 'The
Responsibility of Theatre towards
Humanity. The ITI in the 80's'. The Aus-
tralian delegation will include Linda
Armon, Keith Barn, Catherine Clarkson,
Frank Ford, Glenda Leonard, Ken Ross
and Martin Thorsch.

UNESCO CONSULTATION ROUND
UNESCO has forwarded a list of questions
to be answered before 20th May to help
those planning for 1984-1989. This is an
important opportunity for all theatre
people to influence the future work
of UNESCO and of the ITI. Further information
from the ITI Centre.

ASSITEJ CONGRESS

The 5th world congress of the Inter-
national Association of Theatre for

Children and Young People will be held in
Lyon. The address of the secretariat of the
Congress is: Theatre des jeunes enfants, 23
rue de Bourgogne, 69009 Lyon, France.
17th to 20th June 1981.

JAPAN

There will be an exhibition of weapons
theatres and a seminar on foreign drama
Tokyo September 1981.

INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON NORTH AMERICAN THEATRE TRAINING AND CRITICISM

A series of colloquia are being organised to
coincide with *Chicago II* the Toronto
Theatre Festival, 14-21 May. First collo-
quium 14-15 May on Theatre Training in
Canada, events based at York University.
Second colloquium 17-21 May, on North
American Methods of Performance Train-
ing, sponsored by the Canadian ITI
Centre. Third colloquium 17-21 May, in
focus primarily on Theatre Criticism
Problems, and Possible Solutions, at-
tended for working theatre critics around
the world as well as theatre editors. These
events have been co-ordinated by the ITI's
Permanent Study Committee on Theatre
Training and Criticism.

FILM

Roadgames — exciting final scene

by Elizabeth Riddell

Roadgames is a truckie film that owes a good deal to several American versions of the genre, and to the work of Burt Reynolds and Clint Eastwood, although its star, the gifted Stacy Keach, has a style of his own. In fact it is a surprise, perhaps even a shock, to find the kinship of *Fat City* and *Luther* and *Beverly Hills Cop* to name only three films in which he has exhibited the diversity of his talent, driving a load of gag carcasses from Melbourne to Perth in the company of a dog (which he supposes to be a dog) and a bushbucker in the person of James Lee Curtis.

Keach, or Pat Quaid (the fact that I drive a truck doesn't mean I'm a truckdriver!) is forced to use the somewhat elementary device of making long speeches to the dog, asleep in the passenger seat, in order to let the audience know what is happening. These explanations fill in, or at least cover over, numerous holes in the structure of the plot. Pat also soliloquises while at the wheel (rather more than seems probable, building up a picture of himself as loose-

philosopher, 33-year and king of the road James Lee Curtis, or Pamela, or Hank as Pat prefers to call her, also lances herself as some of the above. She is a bored Californian girl, daughter of an American diplomat, on the run from menotomy.

Pat picks up Pamela, strictly against truckie rules, because he believes there is a Jack the Ripper on the road, trailing along in a green panel van. The police want to cut about missing incidents on the Nullarbor, and the man in the van becomes Pat's prime suspect, especially after he is reported with a shovel bigger than himself digging a hole just off the track, in which to bury something — a body, or a bit of a body, as the killer is thought to chop up his victims, distributing the parts quite widely. Pat tries to alert the police at a corner store but the mousy locals play the guitar too loudly he can't make himself heard in whatever police station to which he gets connected. He could, of course, have used his two-way truck radio, but that would have been too easy, and foretold a scene in which everybody looks madder and behaves in a maddening manner.

So off he goes on the road again, harrying along after the van, sharing a stick of celery with Pam Huch, and a message with Rowell the dog (not named) until confrontation in Perth.

In the meantime there have been some good road scenes — a car with attached

crusher is forced off the road because the driver was shocked, the police question Pat while Pam hides behind the truck cabin, Rowell is slightly wounded by a billiard room cowboy, Pat attempts to rub somebody else's motor bike and run it into a wall.

The Perth confrontation is a kind of reverse of the standard car chase: the van turns the monstrous truck, which in turn is being followed by a police car, into ever narrower streets. The grinding pace gets slower, the truck's sides scraping against bricks while bits of it are sheared off. Finally it becomes stuck fast, in preparation for what is a truly exciting final scene.

Roadgames has been quite a long time on the heels of two American principals are supported by a competent cast of Australians from whom not much is asked — Marion Edwards, Bill Sweeney and Alan Huggood among others. The producer-director is Richard Franklin who made *Florrie* and *The Blue Lagoon*; the screenplay is by Everett de Roche; the director of photography is Edward Monson and the stunt co-ordinator, who deserves a mention, is Grant Page, who also plays the mousy man in the van. The truck, stunt driver was Heath Harris.

One of the film's disappointments is that the Nullarbor looks not especially vast, nor very interesting. But the producers can't be blamed for that.

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DANCE

An Evening

by William Shawbridge

I think it was Agnes de Mille who mentioned in her memoirs the particular difficulties and agonies of having to be a choreographer of dancing, vacant of mind in front of a group of dancers with their "pained, drawn faces" who are waiting for their leader to be creative. . . in union time.

For most of us the idea and the image are enough but Ginevra Murphy in his newest full length work *An Evening* chooses to theatricalise the idea as a connecting thread, waxes the apocryphal form of the ballet as a whole. He places his dancers down in a hermetic and clean expanse of stage floor nice to see a Kristen Fredericksen set without all the usual folk and courtesan/behind a forest curtain that, as it runs, suggests by a simple optical illusion the idea of the depth of the creative imagination, out of which thoughts and concepts come whirling as if from a vortex.

The dancers are covered in black cloth and they huddle around and entangle the

choreographer as Mr Murphy's waxes their folds to the flat experimental sensibilities of Charles Ives' "The Unanswered Question". It's a campy idea for a prelude because I've a feeling that Murphy is drawn to the possibilities inherent in the music's title rather than any illumination of it or of his particular creative angst. As an opener it works well enough, but becomes downright repetitive and redundant when elaborated on later in the evening, becoming a sort of continuing night gag, obsessive about these ideas being manhandled into shape and finally given birth.

It works only as far as hanging the pieces together, and as such is as good as any other idea. For this is what *An Evening* needs if it is not to subside into the shape of a couple bill inexplicably shoe horned in together.

The work contains the form of a linear, cumulative non-narrative that was first experimented with in *Reveries*, it goes no further in developing the form but exists merely to call the piece a full evening work, a redundant title but one that Australian audiences, we're told, feel more comfortable and cosy with.

For some reason Murphy has decided on playing the three pieces consecutively

without a break. The whole "evening" works out to about 90 minutes, and what with the wrenching gear changes (of focus, concentration and interpretation) for the audience, exacerbated by the work's form and progress, and the myriad array of the material, one leaves the theatre somewhat shell-shocked and weary from the onslaught.

Perhaps Murphy intended the audience to get some sort of overview of dance from presenting it thus, but the concert, and it is one, breaks down because the array remains too diffuse and cluttered. It is a problem of structure, which, if no rigorous blue pencilling is going to be done, could be alleviated by having a short interval between each piece. Far from letting the work lapse into the "triple bill syndrome" this would allow the audience time to collect their thoughts and judge each piece on its own merits.

As it was, at all the performances I attended, *Part 1*, which has the best dancing in it, was greeted with glum indifference and barely stifled yawns. The audience had loved the "Ten", show-dancing *Part 2* and was almost hysterical with anticipation. Like most hysterics, they wanted more of the same or a slap in the face. What they got was a quart,



Joan Turner and Ginevra Murphy in the chair from *Part 1*. Photo: Dennis Green

aching, ruminative expanse of slowly unfolding dance poses and they choose not to enter deeply into it.

In *Part 1* after a slow solo for girl and "discovering" studio mirror and a pat scene of "class and rehearsal" we return into a diaphanous cloud of classical romantic dreaminess. In the above mentioned interviews, Murphy spoke of *Part 1* being a sort of homage to George Balanchine, the acknowledged master of classical ballet in this century; in fact many of those in the audience who knew their dance-master had a great time playing "spot the crib." There was the famous "hands up-and-warding-off-the-way" gesture from the opening of *Serenade* the Post-in-Interact-of-Muses from *Everreid* and the pas de deux was more than reminiscent of *Chaconne*, and if it comes to that, the creative struggles underlined more than a nod at *Divans*.

But it was what Murphy intended, a respectful homage to Balanchine's style, if a little bold at times, and there is a lot to be said for emulating such a style so skillfully rather than getting caught in a total "sameness" that only swallows its own tail.

The pas de deux is the best part of it, with some lovely lifts and partnerships that aren't contrived or forced and the second female ensemble entry, with a subtle spotlighted as a foil to the Balanchine manner is a wide winging moment of arching arabesques and grace, like footwork that rolls and weaves within itself like the sea. The favourite Balanchine touches like the garlands, "tornadoes" and chains are touched with a deft Murphy signature that keeps them unique like a tang of lemon where you'd expect honey.

Part 2 is the least successful part of the work, not because of any nobility on my part toward "show dancing", far from it, but because it lacks more in an empty theatricality than in a presentation of what constitutes "show" dancing.

The situation is that old backstage musical standby, the young dancer being selected by the choreographer and riding the leading lady train to the chagrin of another leading lady (in this case the singer-dancer Geraldine Barrat). What coaches the rather than theme is a jolly mass of tap-dancing chorines, backstage "myntique", Astaire-Rodgers luncheon and glides, Chorus Line stylizations and a general resented-mixed outcome.

Murphy has taken the blizzard of this particular dance style and simply reshaped it, the choreographic interest fades because there's a curious warmed-over feeling about it that relinquishes any analysis of genre and gesture.

The company puts a lot into it, without raising interest in what they're doing and finally prove to us that the more staid the means of expression (and it does remain



Alphonse Mucha and Russian Shost in An Evening Photo. Brown Dots

stiff) the more conspicuous the effort to create interest. It is all so games, so propulsive and effusive without any subtlety or substance that it's like getting a love letter from an idiotic, all-in capitalist.

Part 3 contains the best choreography and the greatest interest of the whole work. It succeeds everywhere for the same reasons that *Part 2* doesn't. It could be perhaps because Murphy took more at home in the style, it being consequently the style that he has devoted himself over the years. It could be because he is no longer burdened with having to illustrate or present a manifesto. Whatever the reason, the emphatic trend of this section of the ballet grows and expands on the stage and in the mind where the others seemed in a bubble.

Occasionally the choreography delves to the music, expanding it rather than walking side by side. The duet for Murphy and Vernon especially is too much of a "mocky mouse" in its restless, insect-like convulsions to the jagged dotted, post-cello twines of the quartet, reminiscent of the prelude to Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*.

Perhaps it is the connection to the music in *Heath's* died during its creation and it is suitably elegant that drew

Murphy to it as being so exact for his idea of the autumnal years of a dancer's predicament. It is a long quarter and Murphy has put material so dense into it without offering any self-conscious fireworks of any sort, that it is no wonder that the audience, reeling from the first two parts and overly conscious of the awful Opera House spits, felt revived.

But this is choreography, rich, unfettered and potent arising from an emotional need. Sometimes the glazed idiomatic surface is ruffled by an outbreak that threatens to disrupt its flow, as if it were a last spasm of defiance against fading ability and means, but it is all caught up in the march of the ballet's logic. The final movement offers tranquil, impassive, dancing, so liquid and natural that the stage image is as great, blank and inevitable as fate itself.

One by one the dancers dance almost eerily, whirling darts and volas that wrap themselves up fold upon fold into the final image of lone individuals reduced to one of the first and last bases of human movement, walking. It could have been movement, it could have been a cop out, but the ballet has built so unconvincingly to that image that we see that walking not as a termination but a germination.

OPERA

I Masnadieri and Rigoletto

by Ken Hensley

The Australian Opera moved to Canberra early in March with Verdi's 12th and 16th operas, *I Masnadieri* and *Rigoletto*. After a short season the company belonged to *La Traviata* joining *I Masnadieri* in Adelaide for another Verdi double-header, and Roscoe's *The Barber of Seville* sharing the Brisbane season with *Rigoletto*.

While neither cast in Canberra was star-studded in the manner that Sydney at least is coming to expect, the company showed that it is strong in vocal talent, the ones of former years that the provinces hear second-rate casts can no longer be sustained. The general level of singing was stronger than, say, English National Opera in London, let alone in Leeds.

Despite the quality of what was on offer, the Canberra Theatre was less than full for the opening of the season. *I Masnadieri* was so neglected for the first time by Joan Sutherland's recent *Orfeo*, Angela Mastroni, who had agreed to learn the part following the announcement of Donald Smith's sudden retirement. Soprano Aileen Fisher was the new Amalia, while Robert Allman and Clifford Grams repeated the other principal roles that they had first assumed last year in Sydney with Smith (now Paul Fennell) and Sutherland.

While changes in cast greatly affected the impact of this little-known opera, it was in the plot that the size difference became apparent. Carlo Felice Cillino drew from the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra the best playing I have heard in opera this year. David Kraus could not equal its total quality or emotional punch in *Rigoletto*, a better and more familiar score, while the Elizabethan Sydney orchestra under Richard Bonteage had failed to excite when it introduced us to this score last year.

The anonymous robbers or bandits of *I Masnadieri* begin the opera as a sociable group of university students drinking in a tavern. They might be siblings of the lads from *Pastor Fido* or *The Fair of Hallowe'en*. The persecuted lover (Marzani) has been reading Plautus when he receives bad news from home. His sudden resolve to turn desperado is thus explained; we may conjecture that wine made from sour grapes propelled his companions to follow



Robert Allman and Angela Mastroni in *Rigoletto* at Perth



Clifford Grams as Masnadiero, Angela Mastroni as Carlo and Aileen Fisher as Amalia in the Australian Opera's production of *I Masnadieri* in Perth

him outside the tavern and the law.

If that seems unimpressive, it merely begins one of the most anti-dramatic first acts ever set to music by a major composer. Scene two introduces the tenor's bad brother, the baritone. He is so uninvolved in evil that even Robert Allman, the country's most able stage villain, could not convince me either in Sydney or in Canberra that he believed much of it. In the third scene the soprano and her ancient bosom guardian actually appear together

but there is a secondary relationship that of more discouragement to the tenor's classical purists might have said. The brothers, in whose conflict the dramatic tension resides, are kept apart all night. By the first act curtain we have been thoroughly sick to, but we might just as well have been watching an elaborately costumed concert.

The national company actually met the challenge by paying its most convincing voices Sutherland and Smith. Without

either the piece actually gains in credibility, Mariani being younger and taller than Smith, and Adèle Fischer invents the role of Amalia with a touching vulnerability. Like many big operatic voices his sounds are well focused in soft passages, then when opened out, Mariani continues to impress in the upper register; he was occasionally lost this natural lower in his range on opening night.

This problem child of an opera, which caused the company box-office pain both in Canberra and Adelaide, is well served in this production. Designers Lees and Strenett, spectacularly successful in the current *Rosetta*, which they first created in the early 1980s, fare noticeably here. One's first impression of the object is that Allan Lee's beneath his box form. After ten minutes have unfolded with an air of waited time, one grants him more respect. On the other hand, the most memorable aspect of Michael Strenett's costume design is a sort of mad-hatterism, the whole fringed toupie being crowned with outrageous headgear.

The men of the chorus sang so much more consistently in *Agrippino* than one wonders how much their standard was influenced by lambs. Certainly, lambs are a major criterion by which audiences can judge the valour in *Agrippino*, where the names are as instantly recognisable as any in opera. The final Canberra performance, which was the one I heard, was not an evening of constantly applauded arias: adequately sang though most of them were.

For all its memorable arias, *Agrippino* has at its musical heart the great quartet in which the father and his daughter, Gilda, overstep in the Duke's mansion with Maddalena, sister of the assassin Sparafucio. Not only is the physical barrier of the man wall pierced by the concerted voices, so is the treacherous marriage (that had hitherto mutually accused solists in Italian opera, ensuring emotional sterility during ensembles).

Raymond Myers ought to be a superb *Agrippino* pushing about the stage, a small figure among the great, anything but comely, with huge frightened eyes. His voice, though not as beautiful as it once was, is still serviceable. But his is an altogether planned stage figure where every moment and gesture looks rehearsed. The singer seems to be outside the character, uninvolved with it. One thinks of the contrast with Donald Smith's demoted clown, Calio, in *I Pagliacci*.

The original censorship problems with *Agrippino* spring from the portrayal of the Duke as libertine. Reginald Bacon, like most singers who sang this role, seemed more intent on floating a seductive vocal line than radiating sex appeal. He was never about to surmount the difficulties of

the part with a triumphant flourish, but he was coping well when he successfully lost confidence for the whole of the aria "La Donna è Mobile", with predictable result. Rhonda Bruce was warm of voice and innocent of beating as Gilda. It was simply the best of the major performances, a worthy successor to the superb Calio in the same role.

In the smaller roles the company showed an important aspect of its strength. Donald Smith was a giant Sparafucio, capable of dispatching a victim by snuffing or asphyxiating, without need of a weapon. And that cavernous voice! As Maddalena, Lenore Sonder matched an opulent contralto with ample physical charms in *I Masnadieri*. Bruce Martin and Lamberto Furian had also shown the immense advantage that a principal artist's voice brings to a minor role.

After having blamed Verda and Rossini in March for the fact that Shakespeare's *Demetrius* is still able to get tongue after being smothered (the incongruity seems far greater in the opera) I return to the subject of singing corpses. Having been substituted in a sick, and given by the villain Sparafucio to Agrippino, Gilda manages a conversation with her father before expiring.

H.M.S. Pinafore

The State Opera's decision to start 1981 with a production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* was not one of its happiest ideas. For a start, they were contending with the recalcitrance of the Australian Opera's witty sparkling and energetic version of *Pinafore*, and secondly, there seemed no strong reason on the evidence of this production, for resurrecting the designs of the earlier version done here by Adrian Slack, with Edward Woodward as Sir Joseph Porter.

Admittedly, this production had one strong plus — the person of Dennis Oles in the role in which Woodward had appeared so pulled previously. It has become a cliché to draw attention to Oles's unique abilities in Gilbert and Sullivan scores and it still deserves to be re-emphasised. There was, quite simply, no comparison between his light-footed, snappy and energetic reading of the role and Woodward's limp performance earlier. And it simply will not do to imply as has, especially been done, that the employment of his talents in Gilbert and Sullivan is somehow not worthy of serious attention: any performer with his skills, deftness, wit and physical grace would be worth watching even if he were singing a patter song consisting of names in a telephone directory.

I wish I could be more enthusiastic about his debut as a Gilbert and Sullivan

I do not have access to Victor Hugo's original play, but I must comment that a thorough professional like Sparafucio would never have delivered a substitute body unless it were well and truly dead. The Duke's audience was what the poster paid for, and he should not have been so easily able to discover the deception.

It is not that singing knife or sword victims should be without a song on their lips as well as a hole in the heart. Who can forget Donald Smith's delicious horizontal swoonings, surrounded by his court in *A Masked Ball*? Something presents a special problem, but the case of the matter is the place of language in the emotionally heightened, non-naturalistic world of the opera stage. Verifiably, opera is a slow-motion art form. Gilda must be recognised, it is more dramatic if she sings, but will be anti-climatic in terms of her father's comprehension and grief if she is monosyllabic. The demand of high melodrama for a slow death is considerable, but does not lapse with a professional star upon Sparafucio. What a pity that so few of the Australian Opera's singers (Mariani being an honourable and perhaps understandable exception) make their words comprehensible.

director. For much of the sparkle and vitality that characterised his own performance was noticeably lacking in the production as a whole. There were some marvellous touches — above all, a riotous series of reprises of "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore", which included an appearance by Oles in *Sopranos* cape and attire. But elsewhere, this production, though neat and clear, was frankly, rather dull.

Some of this was undoubtedly attributable to Denis Vaughan's unimpaired approach to the music. All the notes were there, in their right place, but there was precious little music and even less sense of Gilbert and Sullivan's style. It is all very well to take Gilbert and Sullivan seriously, but seriousness of intent is not the same as surfeit of touch or lightness of hand. The music plodded where it should have tripped, meandered where it should have leapt, dithered towards goals it simply lacked rhythmic vitality.

The singers coped well for the most part. Thomas Edmunds was reliable as Ralph Rackstraw and Roger Horvath contributed an alert and energetic Captain Corcoran, as well as a rich and rapid transformation to Able Seaman in the end. The chorus work was accurate without being inspiring, a competent which, overall, applies to the entire production.

THEATRE/ACT

The role of women

CANBERRA ROUND-UP

by Janet Healey

It could be said that one of the indices of a community's dramatic vitality is the amount of activity on the fringes of the established theatrical scene. In Canberra during March, we had the closest of season of a plethora of lunch-time theatre rushing in to fill the vacuum created by the absence of full-scale local productions.

Chekhov's short plays, which put me in mind of working slouches for his huge treatments of human frailty and vulnerability, are a natural choice for this time-slot, offering just the right blend of serious concerns generously flavoured with comedy. We had no fewer than three versions of *The Proposal* (one of which I missed) and a production of *The Bear*. John Paisley's *Proposal* at the ANU Arts Centre was first rate off the rank, and set a sparkling pace.

In this play the thin skin of late nineteenth century romanticism bulges with the conflict of three self-worshipping personalities, and much of the comic impact depends on the resulting surface tension. Paisley's economical production, stark against huge black drapes, achieved this precise balance admirably, being played for all the laughs it could get without degenerating into farce, and avoiding so-faced social comment. John Cullen's ageing hypochondriac bachelor was especially fine, but in such a performance comparisons are odious.

Repertory's production failed to emulate this high standard. It was far more elaborate in stage dressing and costume but less convincing in production and casting. Laughter was the primary aim, and the play suffered in the process. I suspect that each player had his upon a comic mannerism to encapsulate the role: but Chekhov, even in these small plays, eludes so easy a taxonomy.

Sandwiched between these two productions were seasons of J M Barrie's *Rosindell* (Repertory) and Oscar Strauss' adaptation of *Anna and the Moon*. The *Chocolate Soldier* (Canberra Opera) Barrie's little play reflects his obsession with the problem of ageing — a variation on *Peter Pan*, one might say. The middle-aged heroine is as young as or as old as the

chooses to be and as her audiences, both on and off stage, see her. As the watershed between youth and middle age myself, I sympathised with her schizophrenia, but was ultimately unconvinced by the vaudeville quick-change from comfortable middle-aged spread to springing youth.

The *Chocolate Soldier* tased just one question: why bother? Sheer's play, with all its verbosity, makes the point much more tellingly than does the repetitive honk-tonk of this justly almost forgotten musical. Despite the unscripted aid of a premature drill outside the theatre, which lent some verisimilitude to the off-stage battle, the battle on-stage between virtually meaningless material and some not inconsiderable talent was lost before the curtain went up.

The March 'sandwich theatre season'



Gerry Taczovsky and Nick Carline in Repertory's *Without Women*

concluded with another Chekhov play, *The Bear*, in the foyer of the Canberra Theatre. Here again, producer John Paisley demonstrated a natural affinity with Chekhov in his understanding of the critical tension between role playing and reality. Margaret de Mottre as Ivanovna gave us a touching blend of haughty and vulnerability and John Cullen as Smirnov was bear-like enough for anybody, smothering the Ivanovna and alternating between rage and self-pity with an unerring sense of timing.

If one were seeking a common thread in these productions, such might well be found in the subliminal theme of the role of women, not in the crude twentieth century fashion but in the more realistic sense in which women have always controlled and manipulated men. Shepherds Theatre on its way to the Australian Drama Festival in Adelaide, brought us two short plays written and directed by Carol Bray, author of the controversial *The Choir* which made such an impact at the 1980 Playwrights' Conference. *Without Women* and *The Forest* explore in very different ways the theme of the woman who takes more even the most masculine of men.

'I love the women inside me' is the affirmation of *Without Women*, a short piece — not yet a play — in which two young male actors putting together a show about women discover their internal feminine dimensions. Much of the piece consists of readings from male authors who wrote with authority and insight about women. Apart from a perhaps deliberate lack of structure, the main failing was vocal inadequacy. Nick Carline and Gerry Taczovsky are not yet expert enough to read Q'Neil, let alone Shakespeare, with the necessary clarity and flowing line.

The Forest, by contrast, is a fully developed play about survival in poverty, unemployment and high-rise violence, counterpointed by the working through of a homosexual relationship in which the survivor becomes the victim. Carline and Taczovsky were more successful here, perhaps because the action of the play is closer to their own natural style. The woman made the man is an object of hatred rather than love, and I found the play unconvincingly grim and pessimistic. *The Forest* demonstrated again that Bray is fundamentally an ideas man and that his plays are theme plays: he is groping for a style which will frame a philosophical statement in materialist medium. I feel confident that he will eventually find it.

THEATRE/NSW

Classics lacking control

THREE SISTERS HAMLET

by Katharine Brisbane

Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov. Numbud Theatre, Sydney NSW. Opened March 25, 1991.
Director: Aubrey Melton; Designer: Kim Carpenter; Lighting: Nigel Jennings; Stage Manager: John Woodland.

Cast: Olga: Anna Volska; Maika: Cathy Downes; Irina: Michele Funktion; Gerasimov: Ben Haskin; Tuzenbach: Steve Forsyth; Selyony: Ivan Kain; Andia: Eve Whynes; Fropov: Basil Ikin; Verkhov: John Bell; Andrey: John Allen; Kolygin: Barry Otto; Nadya: Dorey Rubenstein; Petrush: Tony Mark; Role: Jason Wilson.

(Photo: Gary)

Hamlet by Shakespeare. Sydney Theatre Company. Drama Theatre NSW. Opened March 26, 1991.
Director: William Gaskill; Designer: Hayden Griffin; Lighting: Derek Nicholson; Composer: Neville Lynn; Effects: Stephen Rank; Stage Manager: Peter Williams.

Cast: Horatio: John Passmore; Ghost: Peter King; Irina: Cathy Downes; Celia: Cathy Downes; Mia: Cathy Downes; Kate: Forsyth; Polina: Alexander May; Loris: George Spinks; Ophelia: Paul Haskin; Rosencrantz: Brendan Burke; Guildenstern: Neil Rafter; Player Queen: Diana Davidson; First: George Spinks; Ralph: Catherine; Eric: Peter Coomes; with Stuart Campbell, Ben Burn, John Capron, Andrew Hyde, Derek: Anne Patrick Mitchell; Vera de Rayne.
(Professional)

Sydney was treated this month to the opening of two major classics in one week. Both are played in their entirety (*Three Sisters* 16 hours, *Hamlet* four hours) and both productions concentrate on bringing the works nearer to our time.

Aubrey Melton's *Three Sisters* for which he has prepared with Ludmila Nazarenko a free-flowing, modern translation, is admirably laid and had some revelations for me about the text, including the meaning of the Pskov poem going round in Maika's brain. Kim Carpenter's designs are simple and authoritative, there are some stunning performances, notably from Cathy Downes as Maika, Barry Otto as Kolygin and Steve Forsyth as Tuzenbach.

It is a production made with love and I wish I could say that it moved me more. Perhaps the cast had first-night nerves, but I was too conscious of the preparation behind each character. It was not until the last act that I felt the play come. The pairing of Maika and Verkhov was worth waiting for.



Michele Funktion (Olga), Cathy Downes (Maika) and Anna Volska (Olga) in Numbud's *Three Sisters*. Photo: Graham Green.

I think it was the actors' failure to grasp the pattern that disturbed the rhythms of the play. Cathy Downes, Barry Otto and Dorey Rubenstein as Natalya played at a high level of exposed emotion against

The problem lay not in the conception but in the rhythms of the performance. In Chekhov the silences are as eloquent as the words. The moments are wait for — the humming top, the unspoken word, the crack of the dead winter forest — somehow they passed unnoticed. It all lacked a sense of controlled passion and of lives progressing.

The play opens in the spring of hope, the women romantically elated with the prospect of happiness, with flowers and childish glee. And we follow their awakening to reality — emotional and practical — the breaking up of a small community and the tragic drowning of wider understanding.

It is more than a message of unfulfilled hopes: it exposes to us the unreality of those hopes. Tuzenbach's death is cruel and wasteful but would his joy have been realised, married to a woman's desire (capable of love)? Every incident is part of a pattern we must learn to understand it

which the rest of the cast as dance seemed curiously flat. John Bell's Verkhov had a touching self-deprecatory wit but little supported seriously to match Downes' Maika. Anna Volska and Michele Funktion, as Olga and Irina, seemed to have a block between their comprehension and emotion. Ivan Kain's Selyony was oddly wholesome for a reprobate's paragon, and John Allen as Andrey seemed deflated before the action begins.

The production deserves to impress, more and will improve with performance. With all these reservations I recommend it to you.

Melton gives us a young star in Celia Frith who, at 26, has already impressed with a wide range of work for the State Theatre Company of SA, Numbud and the Sydney Theatre Company. He is clearly an actor whose life is on stage, to watch him is to remember him.

I can see why the STC chose him to play Hamlet, and he rises splendidly to the challenge. He is good looking, athletic and handles the verse with an ease not shared by some more experienced actors. From what I have seen of his work I would say his special qualities are a directness and



John Gaden (Hamlet), Cathie Belton (Ophelia) and Andrew Taylor (Claudius) in the STC's *Hamlet*

innocence that express themselves best in simple emotions: comedy, love, moral outrage, fear, vulnerability.

Having said that, I do not know what William Gaskill has been about in this production. He does not build it around his actor's capacities, nor does he impose an interpretation of a different kind upon him.

In the first place he sets the play late Victorian, a period which conjures up the Gothic horror, claustrophobic decoration, madish melancholy, colonialism. Jack the Ripper — and of course Freud — it would seem to me impossible to avoid a Freudian interpretation of the play if you choose this period. And all those elements are admirable grist to *Hamlet*.

But Hayden Griffin's sets defeat the idea of once bare concrete costumes revived mechanically and lit by white light provide an intrusive and sterile background. The worst innovation is the abrupt appearance of giant portraits of John Gaden and Max Cullen for the close scene. I lost most of the dialogue wondering how they left about being compared to Hypocritus and a cynic, feature by feature. Again and again I found myself distracted from the text by incongruities and abundance.

Freud is an out of joint with the murky producers of the period as was the production. Worse, some of the actors were sadly miscast. Star of the show, after Freid, was Alexander Hay as Polonius — a gift of a part to him. John Gaden as the Ghost and the Player King and Nora Harbord as Ophelia give characteristically honest performances, and Ralph Connor as the first gravedigger came in a breath of relief to the third session of the play. But it was a long evening.

Gaskill's *Hamlet* has all the faults of his *Love's Labour's Lost* in the same theatre and none of the virtues of his productions

on home ground. Many of the actors reveal their unfamiliarity with Shakespeare's verse without adding positive skills of their own. The most serious lack is any structure of authority — essential to the performance of Shakespeare even if you choose to ignore it. Central to this problem is Max Cullen, totally at sea as Claudius. Both the verse and the position of political power are outside his grasp. But the problem pervades the cast. Gertrude, Laertes, Horatio and finally Hamlet himself.

Freud's performance — not to be mentioned and we shall see a ghastly performance from him — perhaps in ten years time. But the production misfires against success by conveying a *Hamlet* simply bewildered — who never discovers, as the show must do, what his place is in the tragedy of this world.

Confused issues

THE WARHORSE THE CRUCIBLE

by Anthony Barclay

The Warhorse by John Upson. The Q Theatre, Perth. 19/10. Opened Friday 26 March, 1981.
Director: Richard Brooks. Designer: Arthur Banks. Stage Manager: Pauline Brille-Lawson. Lighting and sound: Ian Young-Lundie.
Cast: Jack Armstrong, Ben Calvert, Jane Denning, Jessica Hensh, Sita Carr, Jane Collins, Nancy Evans, Brian Jenkins, George Thompson, Ross Thomas, David Warren, Craig Ashby.
(Professional)

The Crucible by Arthur Miller. First Stage Theatre Company, at the Coll Block Theatre, East Sydney. First opened Tuesday, 24 March, 1981.
(Professional)

Richard Brooks' production of John Upson's *The Warhorse* is quite the best

thing I've seen at the 'Q' for some time. It's not the kind of play to set the world on fire but the production is honest, restrained and accurately paced. Arthur Banks' set is a simple, uncluttered and realistic living room, the back flats are painted a Southern Cross that is wonderfully sky blue. The effect is to merge easily with the various political periods that pass through. But, above all, it is the acting that is so expert, swift, alert, concentrated.

Indeed the acting was remarkably good given the overall scope of the play. Upson wrote well but there is something slightly annoying about the play. There is something finally unsatisfying about *The Warhorse* in much the same way that Bob Herbert's *No Nukes*. *No Park Devil* leaves one slightly cold. Both writers get considerable mileage out of their respective subjects, in Upson's case it is the spectrum of political behaviour set within the control of local and State issues. More specifically, it is the ALP and the outer Western suburbs of Sydney. There are many moments when Upson makes the political animal in all its play in absurd irony (should the local checks be increased) in mildly explosive comedy (what to do with some forty hectares of land bought for imposing uniform checks, no less — could the ALP make an 'house' deal with Colonel Sanders???) in the daily bread and butter (when the group agree for various reasons and with varying degrees of guilt or satisfaction that the political career of one Ada Carr must coast). Upson, like Herbert, is writing from closely observed experience and, again like Herbert, much of this is done with flair, humour and some degree of compassion. But when one stands back from the interesting moments to look at the whole one notes that both writers' works tend to raise issues with which neither is prepared to come to terms. A well rounded play may well imply certain issues that do not lead themselves to well rounded resolutions. Both writers come close to claying sentimentality.

In *The Warhorse* the play's sympathies fall squarely though not unproblematically with the older politician — Jack Armstrong and Ada Carr. There are the older style politicians and, at least in Jack's case, the more engaging characters. Maybe they are more 'lovable' as people (maybe) but the implicit sympathies they earn from the playwright get a little confused. We are asked to accept and then to forgive and forget but there is no Fred Daily in this piece. I guess it all boils down to one's definition of the word 'political' and in Upson's play it's little more than people who are occasionally involved in politics. To tell with the issues when we are invited to laugh them away. Upson does not confront issues with the power of Sewall-



Jessica Noud (Jessie) and Ben Gabriel (Jack) in *The Warzone*. Photo: Trevor Connell.

dropped the actor's occasional long-windedness in *The Father We Loved*. There is a kind of implied irony here: human beings never and by change, the kind of sentiment of 'that's all there is'.

To focus these thoughts. That the ALP has 'changed' is mentioned several times in the play. But that change is not seriously assessed — or, perhaps, it is implied that it hasn't changed at all. If there are similarities between Jack's behaviour (the stashed Luger in the back, we are told) and the young ambitious David Harrow, the play seems to imply that Harrow will learn with the years. Equally Jack is never seen to be as one dimensionally stunted as Rawley Brown or as typically unbusiness as David Harrow. He is, for all his wars, an ironic aware politician — they are 'Where is the venue/multitude here?' in *Clunkers* or *Sydney*?

This made for some very thin writing in places. Both Kevin Jackson and June Collins began the play with scope but both were lurching towards caricature in the Second Act when comedy forced its hand for its own sake. Craig Ashley played David Harrow with precision but as I mentioned the part was too neat. He is labelled by Jack as a 'Sunday Socialist' (and one suspects, by Upon too). According to the programme notes audiences have been playing the old 'game' who that character is based on? game (though not as nervously as with Williamson's *Coldland Heron*). And much of the subject matter is all the order of 'yes that happens in REAL life doesn't it' but one cannot but ask the question, obvious as it is, does that necessarily make for coherent dramatic war material?

Ben Gabriel was quite marvellous as Jack and the moments he shared with Jessica Noud (Jessie) were finely con-

vincing. But I found Rob Thomas' George Carpenter to be the most sustained and engaging performance of the evening. My feelings about the play aside, I found the acting to be generally so full of nuance and nuance that that alone made it a rewarding evening.

Fine Sydney Technical College is undergoing a major facelift over the next few years. Part of this will include building up the depleted resources of the Old Block theatre which will be good news for venue-stricken Sydney. At the moment a fine production of Miller's classic *The Crucible* is playing for a large number of school audiences. It's a stark good reason to nearly

every scene. Visually it's packed at a level that gets the right laughs in the wrong place (he is speech) and it looks movement and staginess. Too many lines are delivered with arms folded and feet planted firmly on the stage. That tended to give the work an inappropriate tableau effect and made flow and rhythm very awkward. The audience though seemed appreciative — to something of a step in the right direction.

A glimpse into the past

WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?

by Helen Moss

Whose Life Is It Anyway? by Gerald A. Larner. Australian Elizabethan Theatre, Town Theatre Royal, Sydney, NSW. Directed March 24 (1981). Director: Bruce Hewitt-Jones, Lighting: Walter Van Marrewijk, Stage Manager: John Williams. Cast: Ron Harrison, Robert Colley, Scott Anderson, Geoffrey Adams, Ann Yallop, Louise Smith, Peter Ford, Nicole, Dr Scott, Amanda Austin, Dr Emmott, Ruth Lee, Mrs Roy L, Elaine Lee (Mrs Ig. Hill), Peter De Bello, Dr Evans, David Newman, Peter Sanderson, Philip Reed, Dr Scott, Paula Jones, Andrea Ellis, David Jones, Mr Scott, Mr Maloney. Don Pascoe. (1981 season).

For an evening of back-humour acting one could hardly do better than sit through the MLC Theatre Royal's production of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* directed by Bruce Hewitt-Jones. Billed as 'a gripping and quite thought-provoking play' (as well as might be on other hands), this production was actually a trip back into the dreary



Andrew Smith, Fred Steele and Robert Colley in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

1960s of Australian commercial theatre — an experience devoid of any depth or emotion.

To look at the raw material of the play, one would expect it to have everything going for it: a script crackling with stylish if well-worn wit; a theme — a "daring" theme — the individual's right to make decisions about his own life and death (rehabilitation?); dramatized through up-to-the-minute subject matter, a time-tested dramatic conflict between the rights of the individual and the inhumanity of public institutions.

A genuine and provocatively real presentation of the conflict within the main characters would have done credit to the aims of International Year of the Disabled, especially as the main character is a paraplegic.

But what did we get? Stagnant undistinguished "stage" English accents which most self-respecting Australian theatre companies have long since rejected. Television actors chosen briefly for their external attractiveness. Settings more appropriate to *The Young Doctors* than a serious stage play.

The play is full of unrewarding supporting roles, stereotyped to a fault: no doubt to give fuller scope to the main character of Ken Harrison. But it was hard to see why the actors put so little effort into those roles. Annette Andrie, the glamorous lady-doctor who didn't even know how to hold a stethoscope, looked like a secretary. Her "understanding" tone of voice was so neutral as to suggest my indifference even more than "heart of steel" Nurse Anderson. Elaine Lee made a suitably Indian film of the malleable social worker. Indeed only Lynette Smith as the ingenuous Nurse Sadler seemed to bring any freshness to her role.

This general feeling of indifference and unrelaxance was enhanced by the set, whose designer was mysteriously if understandably omitted from the main credits. Indeed the set seemed to be as tediously careful symmetry sought from the drawing board. No doubt it was intended to symbolize the clinical precision of modern hospital life but as theatrical effect was to render all entrances and exits utterly predictable. The attractive circle-eye view of the set quickly gave way to the boredom which a symmetrical set forces upon stage movement, especially with the bedridden hero situated dead centre of stage.

If I will admit to certain reservations about this highly commercial property of a play. The most obvious drawback is the physical unemployability of the central character, which places a greater burden than usual on all supporting actors as well as on the internal qualities of the play. The playwright's apparently desperate resort to the courtroom drama formula is another problem,

but that at least is a theatrical cliché that comes off. Indeed things look up considerably at the Theatre Royal when disabled Ken Harrison hires a lawyer to argue his right to die in peace.

But ultimately, the failure of this production is not attributable to the play but to the actors themselves — to their total failure to convince or move, rarely the main criteria by which such a "concerned" play can be judged. If sheer energy Robert Colby, playing the main character, managed to touch us at the moments when he sings the "hanging judge" who gives him the right to die, but it is a rare moment. Perhaps in the medium of television, where the director, the playwright and most of the cast would have been able to discuss scenes and make alternatives to the visually static moments of the play and we would have more fully entered the world of Ken Harrison.

The fact is that it was impossible to

believe for a moment that Robert Colby was paralysed. Attractively lively in companionship with the dead wood around him, his very strength proved his downfall. The numbing archness of his witlessness hardly suggested the tortured self-care of an intelligent man trapped in his own body. Even his pleasant physical features went against him from a visual point of view: it was very hard for a stage audience to detect much expressive nuance in it from a distance. But there are many who will applaud him for his vitality and for the superhuman effort of remaining physically limp all evening.

There are many too who will overlook faults in this production because of its "important social content". But there are those like me who will remember this evening as a glimpse into the past — an example of what most Australian theatre now thankfully is not.



Brian Blain (Frank) and Des Darn (Saul) in Theatre South's *Travelling North*

Low key handling

TRAVELLING NORTH

by Barry O'Connor

Travelling North by David Williamson, Theatre South Ballarat, 9/9. Grand March 1981

Director: Gordon Hayes, Designer: William Pritchard, Lighting: Michael Howell, Stage Manager: Michael Morris, Jury: anonymous

Cast: Frank, Brian Blain, Frances, Faye Montgomery, Saul, Des Darn, Brian, Barbara, Thomson, Sydney, Sheila, Bobbie, Jane, Pat, William, Emily, Geoffrey, Michael, Christine, Kate, Helen, Anderson, Geoff, Greta, Annemarie, Bill, McLean (rehearsants)

Travelling North has been given a low-key handling in the Theatre South production. The colours are muted with no significant contrast between the woolly

greys of Melbourne and the washed out hues of the North. The acting verges on Bergian-esque intimacy — whether to prove Williamson's realism or his full cast, or to avoid the many acoustics of the institutional auditorium. I don't know if works for most characters but not all. Brian Blain's Frank is at a decided disadvantage: his quiescent elegance and powerful vocal resources better suit him to the nineteenth-century Covent Garden stage. However, Faye Montgomery's Frances manages to make the play her own. There wasn't a moment when she was out. Good support comes from Geoffrey Morrell's Freddy and Des Darn's Saul. With so many "concrete" scenes necessitating so many transitional blackouts, the lighting has to be spot on and the scenes have to find their stride just as suddenly. This lively kind of punctuation and playing was sadly lacking.

condition without giving breathers into the state of mind, or the way of the path back to sanity.

The self-consciously ingenious delivery, explicit with poems, did nothing to quicken the pace of an overlong play, and if one came away exhausted it was more from witnessing the emotional input of the cast than from the slowness of any emotional depths in the audience.

Precision and athleticism

WEST

by Adrian White

West by Simon Barlett. World premiere season by British Training Company. Wages, NSW. (Opened March 20.)

Director: Peter Barlett. *Design:* Anthony Robert. *Lighting design:* Peter Barnes. *Costume:* Julia Collins. *Music:* Greg Kerr.

Cast: Emma Johnson, Justin Byrne, Gavin Ford, Wayne Pappas, Rob Barnes, Ken Moffat, Gabe Hax, Anthony Mullins, Peter Holmes. (Performers.)

West extends and enriches Barlett's preoccupation with lower middle-class life in a vision as displayed in *East*, and Peter Barlett's RTC world presents of the play complemented gruffly elegant writing with precise and glittering stage effect.

Disembly centring on a confrontation between rival street gangs in Hoxton and Stamford Hill, *West* offers sharp insights into the gritty, violent, sad and corrupt world of young people caught in London's depressed suburbs, in which daytime reform is made bearable by nightly exploits.

The play's language is little short of breathtaking in its synthesis of rhythmic Shakespearean cadence and London vernacular. "Breathless, I was afraid when I saw standing between the full moon and the lamplight, this geyser all armed, a certain aim he took, and felt the security get from Hoxton with a deft and subtle chop I never witnessed Mike I never saw before and grew form in leather stacked." This quality of writing characterises the entire play, creating the problem of recording stage action with such poetic dialogue.

Barlett's direction inventively capitalised on balletic values to intensify both grace and menace, his London cock-sparrow toughs achieving physical terms what Barlett achieves in the script: a fluidity that swelled easily between innocent movement on the one hand and razored violence on the other.

The result was precision and athleticism in a play that is anecdotal rather than developmental and which glazes its ex-



From East (left) and West (above) in RTC's West. (Photo: Peter Morris)

descriptive language. Barlett also utilised a cornucopia of lighting and sound effects, rendering the light sequences an enactment of motorbike and car and a whirlpool of peak-hour tube travel especially telling in stage terms.

Emma Johnson as the bearded hill gang leader Mike brought a cool easy style to those areas of the play needing sly humour or brash suggestiveness, but

lacked a measure of toughness. His opposite number Rob Barnes starred in this respect, and of the other cast members Justin Byrne, Gavin Ford and Ken Moffat (doubling as a mobster and Mike's men) particularly stood out. Barlett's stark and farcical set served the action well, and Greg Kerr's Beethovenesque music gave a *Clockwork Orange* feel to the show.

Plenty of sting

BLEEDIN' BUTTERFLIES

by Paul Cowdy

Bleedin' Butterflies by Emma Clarke. Darwin Theatre Group. N. Opened March 27 1991.

Director: Robert Kimber.

Cast: May, Shayne Laybutt, Lee Peter Hyde, Nina Evans, Jack, John Evans, Chris, Lesley Hazwell, Jimmy, Michael Glasman.

(See/Am)

"Up in Darwin — where everything bites but the butterflies." So, according to Bill Wannan goes one Australian saying about life in this northern city, but the Darwin Theatre Group gave Emma Clarke's *Bleedin' Butterflies* plenty of sting in their production of the play.

Anticipating a Melbourne Playbox Theatre production by two weeks, the Darwin troupe's performance was particularly praiseworthy since it introduced a virtually untried cast to local audiences. This decision put a special onus of responsibility on director, Robert Kimber, but he played his faith in the cast, foregoing any attempt at technical gimmickry to add impact.

Kimber saw parallels between Clarke's lead players and those of Brodie's *Mother Courage*, apted for emotional honesty and from historical material in part provided by the author, audited with his own the depression era in which the play takes place.

This gaudy costume and presentation a foil for the hard times which dominate the story. The heavy tent, sunbleached wood and ivy-caked rocks of the set add to the bleak reality of life at the Canning Bridge campsite.

But the triumph of the production was the choice of Shayne Laybutt to take the lead role of May Sewell, the vulgar realist who Clarke allows to dominate the play from start to finish.

Physically suited to the part, conveying simultaneously the warmth of womanhood, and the hard truth of practical survival, the broadbipped Laybutt stomped through her role as masculine boozie, crushing the sentimentalism and hypocritical about her.

Clarke, clearly concerned with the injustice of patriarchal society, and its female victims during hard times, gives the male roles that scope for development or for winning audience sympathy.

The exception is Jimmy Lamb, the orphaned boy who is finally sacrificed by May to the broader interest Jimmy is played by Michael Glasman who was fully aware of the danger of allowing Jimmy to be merely an embarrassing child, and successfully lead the audience along a

tightrope in which balance was maintained between humour and affection before his final downfall.

At the same time, helped by May's subtle commentary, "Probably stopped to play with himself when he saw what he'd got in his hand", Glasman conveyed all the raw sexuality essential to the role. It was the key performance of Laybutt and Glasman which lifted the performance from 'not bad' to 'good'.

Others in the cast were competent, and probably only needed to be that, since Clarke only wrote them as foils to May and Jimmy. Kimber says he encouraged his troupe to interact to avoid melodrama — and that would be an easy trap for a less experienced director — but when May left the stage the cast did seem to flounder a little. The play's serious message, too, Peter Hyde showed plenty of aggression but lacked the forcefulness of true male chauvinism.

John Evans, as Jack Broadbent, the

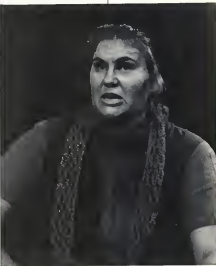
mother's boy whose patriarchal form obscures both true charity and his own sexuality, didn't quite have the assertiveness of the righteous.

Jimmy's devoted mother, Nina, (Nina Evans) looked properly prim in response to May's outrageousness, but failed to give the audience a sense of her martyrdom, which was to lead to her suicide.

Chris, married to Broadbent out of the goodness of his heart, was too faint and virginal — after all she was a fugitive from the police, pregnant, and finally one of the few survivors — as played by Lesley Hazwell.

But all these criticisms must be tempered by the knowledge that the cast was new, overshadowed by an excellent May and given few lines with which to express individuality.

There is no doubt that the Group has found new talent, though some will need development.



Shayne Laybutt (*May*) in DTG's *Bleedin' Butterflies*.

THEATRE/QLD

Taking up the challenge

OUT OF WORK, OUT OF MIND CROOK SHOP COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

by Veronica Kelly

Out of Work, Out of Mind by Brett Sullivan/Crook Shop by Richard Williamson. Popular Theatre Troupe, Queensland.
Director: Doug Anderson, Design: Bob Dwy, Scene: Bob Dwy
Cost: Michael Cummings, Julie Watson, Ben Ward and Tracey Hansen
(Production)

Colonial Experience by Walter Cooper. La Boite Theatre, 2nd Floor, 24 North St, Brisbane.
Director: Glenn Baxter, Designer: David Bell
(Production)

If the community were always to get as much value for its subsidy dollar in terms of intelligent engagement with community issues and sparkling, inventive theatre as the Popular Theatre Troupe regularly delivers, I'm sure Australian theatre would be well into its Pendean Age. In this case the dollars are provided chiefly by the Australia Council, as the Troupe receives no subsidy from the State whose scattered communities it serves so well. A programme of two recent plays, caught during a brief return to base in the course of the Troupe's restless touring, provided an instructive overview of the development in their recent work. The Troupe have over limited their subjects to the inadequately "representative" small scale approach, but take up head on the challenge of large social issues. Nor do they write down nor play down to their usually non-theatre-specialist audiences, as can be the depressing outcome of the cartoon-Commedia style in less committed hands.

Out of Work, out of mind is a survey of the history and ideology of work and unemployment, placing the current crisis in relation to long term developments in European and Australian capitalist history. As is usual in the Troupe's work, the show is jam packed with clearly formulated and structured information which explains, as well as comments on, complex and difficult issues. Near the show's end the implications of this strategy make themselves clear, when the lived realities of the thirties depression are conveyed through the song "The Sandy Hollow Lane" given a moving delivery which leaves the audience weakened

through its sheer power and anger. An arresting piece of theatre beautifully judged and beautifully done.

The newer show, *Crook Shop* described as a documentary satire on the relationship between law and justice, was material provided by the 1977 Lucas Report into Criminal Law Enforcement in Queensland. The show makes its disturbingly large point through the metaphor of popular-magery cop opera, subverting their implicit assumptions about the innocuous "normality" of the activities of state-protected law enforcers. As before the form, *Crook Shop* has a narrative build-up and climax, with a savagely biased point-of-view to clarify issues into the politics of the community at large. Incidentally, it includes the best John Williamson I've yet seen — best because the easily identifiable lines are wittily structured to dissect the "leader's" truly issue-evading and mind-numbing interview techniques.

The show seems already to have exposed the explosively contradictory position of theatre which ostensibly addresses itself to the community. The Queensland Department of Education, subsequent to some well placed phone calls, has barred its performance in State Schools, and plans clothes donations have postponed performances with their presence. As the Troupe enters its tougher-minded and under-subsidised way around the country, it should not be moved. The issues are too important. The Troupe's engagement tears out the front lines of those political and contractual arrangements in Australia which dispute what can and cannot be said and done by whom, to whom, and in what forums, and, most pertinently, under what public sponsorship or protection.

Walter Cooper's *Colonial Experience* at La Boite is a fascinating review of our theatre's origins, and the experience is a mixed delight. It's astonishing to be reminded of the solidity and confidence our playwrighting once had, and depressing to remind oneself of how much of this tradition has had to be rediscovered after the J. C. Williamson colonial night covered the land like the rabble plague, destroying the roots of the nation's growth and promoting its replacement by gaudy and tasteless excess.

The colonial experience run out to the play's New Churn is of a double kind. The usual burning animation is doused out effluage by a harsh brandy to the cadaverous Sam Sparkle, this character seems to be a double and substitute for the tollier Churn who gets the girl without having to sit the horse. Rather disappointingly, the play

does not complete the transformation with an aschamed Sparkle, all smoking, swearing, and cabbage-tree hatted. The experience that matters is laid on by the play's most vocalisation, the Irish quonam "Captain" Vernatic Flame, a wonderful comic observation of an emigrant native type grafted by the playwright on to the outline of the Restoration spark tradition. The role's potential is second upon and wonderfully realised by Graeme Johnson.

The generally crisply directed cast are a little too conscious of "playing comedy". Style, as the PTT shows, is an organ not an imposed, confrontation with the play's material. Fine design by David Bell, whose visual sense and flair never disappears. His setting shows off the great colour and bonhomie of *Colonial Experience* and helps re-establish its position as a forerunner of Kean, Williamson and other observers and celebrators of our paradoxical social comedy.

Failure of metaphor

THE CHOIR

by Jeremy Ridgman/State Rep.

The Choir by Ernest Hay. TSI Company, Brisbane Qld. Opened March 11 1991.
Director: Bryan Nason. Designer: David Bell, Choreographer: Paul Weir, Lighting: Lyngway. Stage Manager: Paul Harris.
Cast: Paul Nason, David Michael McCallery, Colin, Geoff, Clive, Gary, James, Peter, Michael, Glenn, Peter, Paul, Johnny, Mark, Andrew, William, Jack.
(Production)

Like Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, *The Choir* is a cry for liberation of the spirit in the face of antithetical conformity, a theatrical space of grief in the dampened order and muted creativity of the young. Hay's equation of causation to hyperreal brainwashing recalls the nightmare of Shaffer's psychiatrist in which he disembowels the children around to his care though one suspects that here, as in the case of *Equus*, the boldness of the imagery, implicit and explicit, can be all too readily interpreted into "dramatic necessity". However, in the implications of Hay's metaphor, not its substance or immediate effect, which constitutes the play's major flaw, again, as in *Equus*, the question of the appropriateness of the play's allusions and symbols worries one's



Patrick Ryan, Robert Birch, Michael McCaffrey, and Jon Pank as The Thin Christ

rational sense long after the emotions have recovered.

If the recent Nimrod production seems to suggest that somewhere between Canberra and Sydney Neil Armfield developed doubts about the play, Bryan Mason's production emerges as a complete act of faith in both its form and content. The TN Company's rendering is forceful and sensitively balanced, drawing superlative performances from a cohesive and dedicated cast and sustaining a rare emotional intensity throughout the evening. David Bell's act, dominated by a whitewashed *Reservoir Dogs* monolith and a towering rack of blood-red caskets, upholds a compelling anti-naturalism not perhaps fully realised in the acting style which must cater for a script dedicated to the realistic texture of youthful horror.

The first few scenes are masterly, the exposition of the boys' situation — their restriction, rigorous training and isolation dovetailing with a series of insights into the love and humour that binds them. As an image of the spiritual crippling of children inflicted by the very institutions set up to care for them, the idea of orphans

closed into accepting catstrophism as a sacrifice for social purity is potent enough but as a metaphor, developed and extended through action, it becomes marred with inconsistency and over-exaggeration. Why, for example, in the inevitable and therefore doubly menacing principal of the orphanage a Miss Lawson? Her sex is undeniably made an issue by mention of her predilection for Andrew, the stallion in this arena of geldings. Furthermore, it takes a considerable imaginative leap to the theory propounded by one of the play's all too visible narrators that 'they do it to girls too', the emotional potency of the catstrophism stage is just too restricted. Other inconsistencies are more mundane yet equally questionable, such as the suggestion by Michael that the boys will probably treat their children as they themselves have been treated: an immaculate conception?

As the structure of the play founders in the increasingly fragmentary final few scenes, the back of the metaphor is broken. Suddenly the actors widen to include the whole of the orphanage, the dormitory, inherits an apparently sufficient model,

now becomes a cell in a wider social structure and the question emerges as to whether each cell has its own version of the father figure mentor and bully that Andrew has come to represent. News of boys jumping from upper story windows and the threat of fire seem gratuitously introduced to hasten the apocalyptic climax in which Andrew himself will be destroyed in a ritual of misdirected rebellion.

Perhaps to hope for a watertight correlative can be seen as placing a deterministic straitjacket on a play that seeks to explore the issue of freedom and authoritarianism in an essentially allusive and allusive manner. Certainly, as a cluster of emotionally charged images and insights Bray's finely tuned dialogue and Mason's subtly orchestrated staging cannot be bettered. One's concern is that the failure of a sustained, productive metaphor to shape the action and events prevents the play from transcending the emotional immediacy of the experience and flowering into the political synthesis required by so profoundly important a theme.

Fine performances

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

by Patsy McCarthy

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams
Queensland Theatre Company, 5052 Theatre, Brisbane
Opened 27 March 1981

Director: Rodney Fisher; Design: Graham Maclean
Lighting: Douglas; Night Lounge; Stage Manager:
Patricia Weston

Cast: Maggie Carmen Duncan, Brock, Andrew
McIntosh, Nancy, Brett Bate, Max, Elaine Cusick,
Big Mama, Gwen Wheeler, David, Billy McKenna,
Big Daddy, Noel Ferrier, Cooper, David Christensen,
Reverend Tucker, Les Duncan, Duncan Raugh
Epiphany Theatre, Sydney, Linda Hollaway, Hobart,
Ellen Williams

(Professional)

It is appropriate and exciting that Rodney Fisher, born in Brisbane and among Australia's best directors should give the Queensland Theatre Company one of its finest evenings at the theatre. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a production which demonstrates an understanding of the soul and thoughts of one of the world's great playwrights.

The titles of Tennessee Williams' plays are so universal that this play has dated very little in the twenty-five years since it was written. Through the eyes of his people we face the eternal dilemma of hate combined with love in human relation-

ships, the isolation and struggle for communication, the efforts to overcome sexual repression and the search for truth amidst life's messy illusions. Tennessee Williams, himself a man of deep emotional sensitivity, always speaks powerfully to the feelings of his audience.

These characters are real people and, although the scene of the American South is important, we know they exist everywhere. The three major characters are Big Daddy, his son Brick and Brick's wife Maggie and each demands intense emotional involvement from the actor. All of these characters are complex and full of feelings but are depicted by Williams with a human dignity and a capacity for love which makes them worth knowing and caring about. At the centre of this trio is Maggie the Cat who, like Big Daddy, is a fighter and a life-force in the play. In a house which "breeds of mediocrity" she strives to be honest and is aware of the past position of loneliness and greed in herself. Carmen Duncan, although looking magnificent, was not quite able to bring out the passion and depth of feeling in this character and I could not feel her emotions and fight her struggles with her as an audience member should. Her performance, rather too urgent and pushing, did not quite give Maggie time to develop thoughtfulness and warmth under the surface frustration.

The loss of these emotions in Act One were highlighted when Noel Ferrier's Big

Daddy and Andrew McFarlane's Brick confirmed one another in Act Two. I began to feel the frustrations of the struggle for love and communication, the power of hate and the overwhelming force of loyalty. The viewer felt the fear with each man as Brick realized the truth about his ideal relationship with Skipper and Big Daddy accepted his coming painful death. Noel Ferrier experienced Big Daddy's pain and the audience felt it also. The heroic qualities of Brick the anti-hero began to emerge. What fine performances.

The supporting performances were also strong, especially that of Elaine Cusick and David Christensen. The mediocrity and shallowness of Cooper and Max were accurately portrayed by these two actors. Elaine Cusick is a remarkable actress: it is possible that this body and voice which are so unimpeachably Max could also be those which inspired the sorrow and sadness of Miss Kelly in *The Last Outlaw*. Gwen Wheeler's portrayal of Big Mama was convincing but lacked some of the sympathy which the character could achieve.

The QTC has recognized that Rodney Fisher has triumphed in the harsh struggle of Australian Theatre. It would be heartening, however, if the company could also direct some of its Government subsidy towards encouraging new young actors and directors to ensure the continuation of such first rate talent in the future.

THEATRE/SA

Marvellous touring cast

CELLULOID HEROES

by Larry Hall

Celluloid Heroes by David Williamson. Marvellous production mounted by The Melbourne Theatre Trust Opera Theatre, Adelaide S.A. Opened March 1981
Director: John Bell; Designer: Larry Eastwood; Company Manager: Greg Bell; Stage Manager: Susan Coffin; Props Application: Lighting: Graham Murray.

Cast: Al Sklarson, Robert Alexander, Mike Portman, Michael Carman, Ron Rodden, Wayne Jarratt, Gary Brock, Robin Browning, Wayne Munnam, Jennifer Chase, Alison Markey, Linda Cropper, Peter Small, Peter J. Spence, Dirk Hindust, Kevin Smith

(Professional)

This is a terrible play. The storyline bogs down in the first act and evaporates in the second. At the end, the solidified epilogue starts, preoccupied with death with decay and apocalypticism by the vultures thereafter. There is nothing here about Australia, least of all about its film industry. Even the dancing among its

audiences might be noted into thinking the demise of Australian theatre was being depicted — the production (not) of all affections onto the sibling art form. You thus not only the case rather.

Australian culture is healthy, and lying in that dormant phase after the rains before the fruits and flowers show. It is only important offshoots like this ("We want the world and we want it now" is their motto) that perish in the dark, and eventually so. The main work is robust, and of this there is good evidence in this production. For all the play's weaknesses, I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. So too did the comparatively few others in the house: clapping, laughing, at times shrieking in unison. The saving grace was in the cast — they were marvellous.

With Graham Murray's imaginative lighting, on Larry Eastwood's sizeable set, under John Bell's direction performances were crisp, tight and together. Lame material came alive and shadowy characters took form. Robin Browning and Wayne Jarratt were unfortunate to be cast in parts quite superfluous to the action. Kevin Smith as the menacing Dick

Bratkov gave us some splendid moments but also remained for the most part on the periphery. At the core of things, mirrored on this island as they were by the (usually better) playwright, five characters saved us by forging themselves into a band of family. Tensions boiled, perhaps because Mum had left home for some time and only recently returned, and this hidden scenario provided by far the best entertainment.

Michael Carman and Simon Spence, as the Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee rivals, linked by a fierce fraternal friendship beneath the surface whilst vying viciously for the favours of Ma and Pa (at whose of big sister when no-one else was home)... This was a fine duo. Robert Alexander sustained fever-pitch adjectively as Dad, barely able to control his own histrionics, in alone the shenanigans of his wild and woolly offspring Linda Cropper was darling, dark and mesmerizing as Sis. And Jennifer Chase, warm and worldly, mature and maternal throughout — the still eye at the centre of this hopeless saging storm — gave a truly wonderful performance. Bravo. Let's hope this crew returns to Adelaide with a good play soon.

Juxtaposition of sculptured images

BASKET WEAVING FOR AMATEURS

by Gas Worby

Basket Weaving For amateurs by (Chris Benson) 48
One Ensemble Adelaide SA (Opened March 1981)
Director/driver Nicholas Thomas
Cast Peggy Wallach, Gerry Bunk

"Mad Maggie" died in May, 1981. She was a fighter, a believer, a seeker after a personal and national truth through change, a witness; the most influential Australian modernist painter of her generation Margaret Preston whose lifetime's struggle with form, medium and preoccupation revealed only how great the right have been. And Australia takes the credit and the blame.

The All Out Ensemble (and associated artists) takes the "hot-on-a-boiler" anger of this inexpressible woman and uses it as the emotional core of the event. The effect is voracious gawking, more often therapeutic. The artist's story is told in an environment dominated by a semi-stage (1922-1992) of rude 3-D renderings of her works. Immanuel Blue, (a headless) Self Portrait, Golgotha, Expulsion from Eden. These works focus four of the five "visions" to which the performers, Peggy Wallach and Gerry Bunk, lend their audience. This gallery in question reality reveals. The larger-than-life "Artist" is determined and distinctly "on fire" at the centre of the world. The public is pinned to the periphery.

The strength of the event and its several statements lies in the juxtaposition of sculptured images. By contrast, the words read and over and over rather than gain meaning from the incantatory vocal patterns and images employed by Wallach and the rapid-fire, almost guttural delivery of Bunk. This mixture of fixed and lived, sound and sense, rarely gets with or achieves the quality of stilled life which marked Preston's own work, unless it is on those occasions when Preston's aphorisms are quoted, or in the return to the refrain, "I am the hidden daughter of your error."

There is, in fact, a buildup of tension between performer and audience in the confrontation of desire to communicate, and the lack of understanding registered on the watchers' faces. This confrontation is most effectively resolved by the various sequence-changing assaults and violations of surface and space. The danger in this process is that the particular practice defeats the general intention. We tend to enjoy the destruction of Preston's work for



Basket Weaving for Amateurs

the wrong reason — as a release from the constraints of the performance. But the shift of location which accompanies the "explosion" of energy does at least mean the spectator from the tatters of one discarded image to the wholeness of the next — from going to *Electrolux* — thus following the actor's path. *Slacker Highway for Amateurs*, like Margaret Preston,

rescues from the perception of the object possessed to that of possession by the object.

A piece which is currently exploring the place of another kind of "outsider" in our society is well playing at Adelaide. Nick Gail's *There*, written for the International Year of the Disabled and performed by the Acting Company, treats, in 20 scenes, an

anger born of frustration and exclusion which turns the victim of a genetic "accident" into an avenger. The play works best when it is closest to everyday reality, but the "Tennison" ending to a literary heaped with disaster is powerful because of its improbability. The piece has already received a deal of attention, and will continue to draw interest.

THEATRE/TAS

Works wonderfully as entertainment

TAKING SHAPE

by Amanda Lohrey/State Rep.

Taking Shape devised by Mark Bromfield. Salamance Theatre Company, Hobart. Its Opening March 1981. Director: Ken Kello.

For Got A Name by John Loebe, director, Richard Davey.

The Last Avenue writers and directed by Ken Kello. The Company: Mark Bromfield, Richard Lawrence, Mary McManus, Fiona Stewart, Christine Woodhead, Les Vennart (Professors).

Children and adolescents are among the most demanding of audiences and part of the justification of watching any Theatre-in-Education company lies in exploring with them the new ways in which ideas can be given a vital theatrical form. The Salamance Theatre Company recently premiered in season for the first half of '81 and gave further indication of the Company's success in this area while revealing some of the pitfalls awaiting ventures which aim to be didactic as well as entertaining.

The programme began with *Taking Shape*, devised by Mark Bromfield, a member of the Company. This is a delightful series of innovative and intriguing scenes designed for lower primary grades.

The second item was the John Loebe piece, *For Got A Name* which has already met with considerable success in schools. It tells the story of Friedrich Sorka, a young Jewish boy who emigrates to Australia in the thirties. The play opens with Friedrich, in middle age, belabouring a young Vietnamese refugee, Hahn. Friedrich reveals his story in flashback sequences, linked by conversations with Hahn in which she gives an account of her own experiences.

Despite its period context, *For Got A Name* has a very contemporary feel to it and an impressive emotional authenticity. This is partly the result of the great

naturalism with which it is played. It's also related, one might say, to the method used in devising the piece. John Loebe gathered a collection of documents from the period; the actors read and improvised on the documents; John scripted additional scenes and lightened the improvised material. When the character of Hahn proved unsatisfactory, Fiona Stewart talked locally with a Vietnamese refugee woman and incorporated much of what she said into Hahn's narrative.

As a piece of entertainment *For Got A Name* works wonderfully. The production by Richard Davey makes imaginative use of minimal props — black umbrellas, long scarves, colourful blouses — which not only work well in their own right but provide an ideal model for students of how they can transform everyday objects into effective theatrical devices. The Company performs with great deftness and vitality and there's plenty of music, laughter and tears. In that sense *For Got A Name* is a foolproof piece of theatre for schools — full of lifeblood and a flexible underdog with whom an audience can identify.

Despite that, I've got some reservations about this sort of material. It works well for lower secondary but would not be well suited to extend an upper secondary group. In a sense, it's a piece of easy

deduction. The Nazis are unambiguous villains we can all comfortably hate and Hahn is basically an appendage to the story of the Jewish boy Friedrich. Hahn's dilemma as a Vietnamese is hardly touched on, it remains a topical peg on which to hang an earlier story.

The major item on the STC's programme was to be Ken Kello's *The Last Avenue*, an allegory set in a modern city. The Company previewed six scenes of the play — which runs for an hour and a half — but has decided not to perform it for twelve months or until further work can be done. Ken Kello's aim is to present a range of moral responses to a social upheaval in an impressionistic and open-ended way. The personal problem of giving abstract themes and language sufficient dramatic structure to engage an audience has yet to be resolved.

Salamance has a number of interesting projects to come. Dave Allen will be writing-in-residence from August 1981 and is interested in working on a theme from Tasmanian history. Barry Oakley will be writing for the Company in 1982. Richard Meredith is working on an adaptation of *Ames's Coming Out*. John Gaden has been invited to direct the Dave Allen piece and also to run an actor's workshop later in the year.



THEATRE/VIC

A rare treat

THE TWO HEADED CALF

by Suzanne Spenser/State Rep.

The Two Headed Calf by Stanislaw Witkacy. The From Theatre, The From Factory, Melbourne. Vic. Adapted in March 1981.
Adapted (translated from Polish) and directed by Roger Pulver. Designer: Peter King and Michael Anderson. Cost: Lady Lushchik. Clay: Maggie Miller. Burns: Clay: Geoffrey Gossling. Producer: Edward Malinowski. Chris Grogan, Ludwig Parma. Raymond Stanley. Roger Aspinwall and Murphy. *William Clark* for Robert Clay and Jack Rivers. *Peter Haining*, directed by Jack Jones.

Adapted (translated from Polish) and directed by Roger Pulver. Designer: Peter King and Michael Anderson. Choreography: Evelyn Rogers. Music: Robert Hain. (Professional)

In adapting and translating *Witkacy's The Menaparchia of The Two-Headed Calf* Roger Pulver sharpened the title in the interests of clarity and a more homely style. After its extraordinary reception, he may be tempted in future to lengthen it to "The Persecution and Assassination of The Two-Headed Calf by the citizens of the Melbourne critical enclave under the direction of the Marquis de Phalaris". For it has been a long time since a play has provoked such conservative and systematic misrepresentation, one would almost have thought that none of them had ever seen an Absurdist play. It would appear that overnight the sole purpose of theatre became the respectable distribution of returning in take-home packs like Red Cross parcels for the spiritually deprived. Once they had all leapt in with heads fast onto the I-don't-understand-it-nevertheless-bundage there was nowhere left to go, notwithstanding Jack Hiberno's witty and eloquent defence in the letters page of *The Age*.

In 1914, the precocious and prolific Polish writer and artist Stanislaw Ignacy Witkacy, better known as Witkacy, landed in Fremantle in a party led by his father's friend, the prominent anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, to attend an anthropological conference and investigate the local life. They travelled widely in Western Australia before moving on to the eastern states. When war was imminent Witkacy returned to Europe and Malinowski resumed his field work in New Guinea.

In 1966 while a graduate student in Poland Roger Pulver saw productions of Witkacy's plays. This experience marked the beginning of Pulver's obsession with Witkacy and his decision to write for

theatre, it eventually led him, like Witkacy, to Australia.

The play opens in the Governor's residence in Port Moresby and swiftly moves by boat to the Hotel Australia in Sydney and thence by train to a desert outside Kalgoorlie in the course of which the Governor and his wife appear to be struck down by the dreaded Fly River Fever leaving their young son to fend for himself with the natives. At one level the play is a black comedy in which tragic deaths provide the source of some of the wisest lines and the most bitterly comic moments, but it is also a Freudian Fustian on oedipal frustration, sexual guilt and the crippling effect of parents on their children. In this context Witkacy's ability to transform these anxious concerns into startling comic images makes Witkacy look, by comparison very earnest and straight-faced. In addition to killing off the dominating father, the castrating mother and her lover, Witkacy not only rewrites *Hamlet* but manages to aim well-honed shafts at colonialist politics, imperialist anthropology and the Australian psyche, be it in the form of the legendary bushman or the maternal boomer which isn't too hard for a play devoid of "content".

Peter King's design based on an off-axis interior where the angles of the doors and walls were a visual pun on the conventions of naturalistic theatre, set the tone of what was to be a stylised mockery of the theatre of conflict and issues. Pulver's direction,

was precise and exciting and relied as much for its witty effect on visual parody as it did on Witkacy's considerable verbal facility.

Ironically for a production which inaugurated the new APG policy of bringing in outside directors, the acting style in its acute observation of physical quirkiness, was reminiscent of early APG work. It was a delight to see unassuming humour arising out of intelligent and subtle playing. Maggie Miller's Lady Lushchik was all elegant persistence and velvet gloved manipulation as delivered in the broadest nasal Australianese, and Howard Stanley a commanding ocker prototype, Ludwig Parma, twining and threatening to flatten anyone who misapprehended the word "artist" were a pleasure to behold, as was Peter Haining in the double role of the well up top Governor and later as Jack Rivers the Kalgoorlie target-bagger. Haining's Rivers conjured up visions of Chad Morgan after extensive bridge work.

There were some lovely moments of comic business — two characters are discussing death and other metaphysical matters while one of them is playing *Itsy-Bitsy* up and along the other's arm or when Missibile (See Jones) having completed her very dance and sensuously discarded the as long long rubber python, advances sinuously upon Rivers and leaves the audience out of the corner of his mouth.

The opportunity to see *The Two-Headed Calf* was not only a rare treat in itself, but a chance to engage on a broader base our knowledge of the Absurdist tradition and for some to reveal the limitations of their sense of the theatrical.

Engaging, humorous and harrowing

BLEEDIN' BUTTERFLIES

by Cathy Penke

Bleedin' Butterflies by Darren Clarke. Phoenix Theatre, Australia. Melbourne. Vic. Opened April 1, 1981.

Director: Ben Hume. Designer: Trudy Watt. Lights: Sappi Menger. Musical: Robert Gilbert. Cost: May Swell. Music: Maureen Maughan, Len Swell. David Kennedy. Jack Bradburn. David Swell. Christine Smith. Catherine Lynch. Jimmy Lamb. Mark Macdonald. Kate Lamb. Stuart W. Army. (Professional)

Darren Clarke's *Bleedin' Butterflies* is a satisfying, working class drama set in a shanty town for the unemployed and the



Maggie Miller and Geoffrey Gossling in *William Clark* as *Alice* in *The Two-Headed Calf*

homeless outside Perth during the '30s.

Conceived in a strictly naturalistic vein, the script teems with jokes, anecdotes, songs, popular wisdom and superstitions.

One of Clarke's chief strengths is her ability to write dialogue for women. In fact the male characters in *Albany* (Barrifles) are either weakly drawn and the production at the Playbox leaves little doubt that her chief interest lies with the lives of her three women — frontier women in the stress of a survival frontier — all of them instinctively bound to men who have deserted them.

Her women are sharply differentiated. In an ambience of fish, mutton, bunnies, "vase" and the occasional theft, May Sewell — played with wit and unflinching strength by the brilliant and somewhat over-the-top Maureen Monahan, emerges as the real strength of the camp, her child, eerily vulnerable being tempted by lust, does of social conscience and the proverbial "heart of gold".

Only at the end of the play, when she is deserted by her selfish husband Leo (David Kendall) does she betray any real vulnerability to the appalling poverty and the hopelessness of her position.

By contrast Nora Lamb (Maureen O'Arcy) seems to have been set up for full-scale tragedy from the start. Mother of Jimmy, a retarded adolescent, her life is circumscribed by the bible, a meagre pride, moral rectitude and the apparently incredible hope that her husband Bert will return "from the road". Indeed it is the absent Bert who supplies most of the clues to her character and her rigid determination when she receives a letter from Bert's defunct wife at Mt Barker is no surprise.

The last of the trio is Christine (Catherine Lyons), young, pretty, pragmatic, married and installed in the camp where the lives as Jack Broadbent's wife. Formerly the victim of a run-away chauffeur, she is forced to live in the wilderness. Her marriage is never consummated, she is deserted by Jack, raped by Leo Sewell, loses the baby and, finally, leaves for Adelaide.

The entire action of the play, except the rape, takes place outside Jack Broadbent's shack, and it is the figure of Jack (played rather awkwardly by David Swann) who towers behind the wave of catastrophic

events that brings *Albany* to its inevitable conclusion.

More like a two dimensional cardboard cut-out than a man, bed-bound by convention and riddled with complexes, Clarke uses the sacrosanctious "shusher" that is greeted by the Broadbent shack to create an image for the society that his spewed both the Depressive and the phony town which it appears to use as a further instrument of repression.

If there is rather too much symmetry about the construction of her play and its message, and if it unravels with a speed that detracts from the pain of individual fate, it is more than well served at the Playbox by its cast and the astute intelligent direction of Ron Horn.

At some levels the material of *Albany* is almost too good to be true. It is a drama, and there were times when the achievement of its plot almost led one to expect the customary commercial break. But it is more than that. With a couple of exceptions, the strong performances, the highly detailed and textured set and the astuteness of its dialogue have made it an engaging, humorous and often harrowing chronicle in survival.



David Kendall (Leo) and Maureen Monahan (May) in Playbox's *Albany*. Barrifles (Photo: JCB Books)

An odd couple

THE WOMAN WHO DIED FOR HER HUSBAND THE BEAR

by Suzanne Spencer

The Woman Who Died For Her Husband and *The Bear*. The Mill Theatre Company, Brisbane Theatre Centre, Performing Arts Centre, Victoria, opened April 1, 1991.

Producers: Diana Stewart, Stage Manager: Neil Goodenough, Lighting: James Newman.

The Woman Who Died for Her Husband directed by Eric Phillips. Director: James McCaughey, Designer: Neil Goodenough.

Cost: Apollo (Diana Stewart), Oath: William Henderson, Servant: Margaret Roberts, Admetos: King of Thessaly: Robin Gray, Alkestis: Rosalind Hill (Wieder), Ian Campbell, Phoebe: William Henderson (Servant), Diana Stewart.

The Bear by Anton Chekhov. Director and Designer: Barbara Czarniecka.

Cost: Popova: Rosalind Hill, Looka: Ian Campbell, Semyon: Robin Gray (Production).

The Mill Theatre Company's decision to pair Chekhov's comic-farce *The Bear* with Bergman's tragic-comedy *The Woman Who Died For Her Husband* (better known as *Alkestis*) is a further instance of director James McCaughey's eclectic style and theatrical panache. On first sight the combination seems perverse, almost Greek drama and 19th century satirisation, indeed an odd couple make, but it quickly proved to be not only an apt combination but an inspired piece of matchmaking. For both plays turn on love and death and furciously expose the neurophobic tendencies of their characters. The two couples — Alkestis and Admetos, and Popova and Semyon — are incapable of saying what they mean (and clearly feel) about love because of their fixation with death. Alkestis dies for her husband to prove her love, while Popova wishes she could die the same.

In each play there is a third pivotal character whose task it is to reveal to the couples that what they think is a death wish, is in fact a desire for love.

Thus the role of Heracles in *The Woman Who Died For Her Husband* parallels Looka's role in *The Bear*. This production made the correspondence explicit by using the same trio of actors. Rosalind Hill played Alkestis and Popova to Eric Gray's Admetos and Semyon, while Ian Campbell played Heracles and Looka.

Although the productions had different directors and designers, they were reinforced by a unified visual and spatial aesthetic and a similar imaginative physical scoring style which expressed the company's highly developed ensemble sensibility.

Director James McCaughey's approach



Rosalind Hill (Popova), Eric Gray (Semyon) and Ian Campbell (Looka) in the Mill Theatre's *The Bear*.

was to expose the comic perversity of the central action, (dying for love) rather than worrying about the role of the gods — Apollo became merely an accessory to the action. The texture of the play came through the placement of bodies in space and the resolution of text as sound music.

For *The Bear* Barbara Czarniecka added bear props, a fireman's pole, an execution ladder, a wooden chair and a leather quilt. The characters entered down the pole and left by the ladder which was a brilliant resolution of the problem of the absurd number of exits and entrances in the play and simultaneously a leap away from naturalism into a wonderfully funny, almost slapstick style of performance. The ways in which these very simple objects were explained continuously enriched the comic business and enriched the text. The final scene will serve as an example of this

ingenious fusion of Brecht and Kuchuk, as they are saying "I love you, keep away". Popova and Semyon are walking toward each other backwards, pants raised, they collide back to back at the pole just as Looka slides down it upside down, and as he stops mid-air and registers what's happening they slide to the floor and lay supine splayed out from the foot of the pole, their legs entwined. Popova rises her head to tell Looka not to worry about the cats and she delivers this ridiculous line as if it were a post-coital statement — which in terms of the logic of the play, it was.

The combination of Czarniecka's direction and stunning performances by Rosalind Hill, Eric Gray and Ian Campbell made *The Bear* rank as the funniest and most exciting piece of theatre in a long time.

THEATRE/WA



John Tarrara (Jack) and Rosemary Barr (Jill) in the *Vinegar and Brown Paper*.

Skill and credible plotting

VINEGAR AND BROWN PAPER

by Colin O'Brien

Vinegar and Brown Paper by Edgar Metcalfe. Role in the Wall Theatre, Perth WA, opened March 4 1981. Director: Edgar Metcalfe, Designer: Peter Beuchart.

Cast: Rosemary Barr, John Tarrara, Jill Rosemary Barr, Matthew John Tarrara, Jack, Sue Hawkins, Carol Gillman, Lesley John, Gerald Rothbach. (Under-rep.)

Following the success of *Garden Party*, last year Edgar Metcalfe has written and produced *Vinegar And Brown Paper* a play in the same vein of realistic comedy. This time it is on a domestic rather than social intellectual level, as though the

garden party has come indoors to the kitchen/dining area.

The play focuses on the breakdown of marriage in contemporary suburban. The central action is an erring husband's monthly visit for dinner with his wife and two teenage children. It is set in one of the more affluent hills suburbs of Perth, but could equally translate to a similar setting anywhere in Australia.

A sensitive performance by Vic Hawkins as the husband Jack, a nice mixture of non-out-behaviour, the ripples of a stomach ache and out and out gash. Rosemary Barr's Jill may not get a pleasant, polished face on things, but the pain leading to acidity, even bitterness, of real hurt keep breaking through. The children, played by Liz Harris and John Tarrara, convey this peculiar teenage air of being more knowing and more scarred than their colloquial cool can hide. It sounds a depressing picture and it is, but saved with witty humour and shrewd observation.

Mr Metcalfe adds dimension to his play by breaking with straight realism convention. In a series of scenes Jack talks with his current memories Carol (Gillian Leimberg) and Jill with a young wooer John (Gerald Rothbach). It looks at first as if Jill is in the process of taking a lady of her own, until the realisation in Act Two that John is Jack as a young man. It is a dramatically effective device, skillfully employed.

The writing by Gene Beauden showed a keen eye for the lifestyle of this social level of family, there was also sound direction by the playwright himself. Bearing in mind many current playwrights' inability to get a coherent act together there is no question that Edgar Metcalfe's ability to find a personal theme and his skill in combining credible plotting with interesting characterisation earn him a niche in Australian playwrighting. Certainly his plays deserve a wider audience than Perth provides.

No plausibility

NO NAMES NO BACKDRILL

by Margot Luke

The Names: the Playbill by Bob Harbert. National Theatre Company. Playhouse Fort St. Opened March 1981.

Director: Stephen Barry. Designer: Ross Gould. Lighting: Desmae Gird. Stage Manager: George Evans.

Cast: Robert Steven Tandy. Kathy (Mrs) Gold, Tiger Ross (Col) My Palmer. Margaret Ford, Joyce Folds. Lani Baron. Maude (Doris) Browning. Ivan King. Kevin (Paul) Landon. Jay (Wald) Wood. (Guest Artists)

(Reviewed)

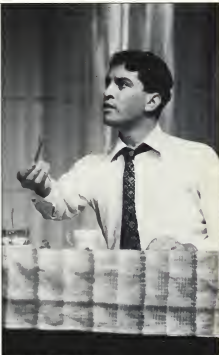
One keeps wondering why Bob Harbert wrote the play. It's neither quite comedy, nor quite period-piece. It doesn't really say anything original about descriptors from wars, nor about human relationships when people are suddenly thrown together in situations of crisis or unpleasant misery.

The set (by Steve Nolan) gave opportunities for nostalgic dream — the awful furnishings were just right, but why did even the barman have to have the ugliest possible version of the 1940s hairstyle? And the thing seemed rather self-consciously dragged in for verisimilitude.

It's 1942 — Sydney — and an American deserter holes up with a young woman who enjoys a few parties with the Tanks while her husband is away fighting. (He's later reported killed.) She conspires with a wheeler-dealer to help the young American slip out of the country; naturally she falls in love with him, and naturally there are a number of off-beating moments (most particularly towards the end of the play), with a noisy landlady, local policemen as well as American military police providing the interruptions.

The first act is too wordy and repetitive, and one could forgive Margaret Ford for trying too hard to deliver it with a scold-up of the landlady (who later becomes more convincingly — and three-dimensionally nasty). In fact, the impression remains throughout, that the play requires great mitigation in direction to make it come to life at all. In Stephen Barry's production there is far too much stiffness — characters standing cross-legged talking to each other, and not knowing what to do with their bodies. There is a fair bit of convincing too.

Stephen Tandy, whilst likable as the young "forward" (read "survivor"), has difficulties with the American accent — which helps to overcome by flattening his voice to an uncomfortable degree. Sher Gold, appearing in her first big role in the Playhouse, is not allowed to use her natural charm, but is forcefully toned down into a



Robert Steven Tandy in *No Names No Backdrill*

drabbed suburbanite — totally wrong. A 1942 girl with a flax in Range Cross, even if she does only work for the post office, would not dream of being dewy, and wouldn't be seen dead in that hairstyle.

The minor characters come out rather better — Ross Cole makes the most of the meaty part of Tiger Kelly, the shady black marketeer and fixer, and Ivan King is impressive as the detective, moving from

misogynist paternal authority figure to vindictive petty tyrant.

Possibly the main trouble is that one doesn't really believe in any of the characters — their motivations or their actions. Neither do the lines they tell each other, nor the subterfuges they engage in have any degree of plausibility, and the dialogue is not sufficiently interesting to distract the mind from this basic weakness.

BOOKS



by John
McCaffery

Legacy but not tradition

Contemporary Australian Drama: Perspectives since 1955. Edited by Peter Hallaway. Currency Press, pp 324 95

Someone once said that a critic is a person eager to praise greater people than himself, but he is never able to find any. An illiterate, witless, incoherent ragbag collection of writers, directors and actors stumble through the theatres for review and the critic is expected to be literate, witty and coherent writing about them. It is an impossible task — one which only an unquerable optimist, with a profound love of theatre, could continue to attempt.

And yet Australian critics continue to do this. In Currency Press's 10th anniversary book, *Contemporary Australian Drama* records their efforts, and it is reveals that in many important ways they have failed, it is still salutary to note the magnitude of their task — before, in turn, criticising them.

While, after years of relative silence, Australian plays suddenly came tumbling onto our stages, in the '50s and again in the '70s, there was no critical climate of opinion in which to describe and evaluate them. Like everybody else the critics were taken by surprise. And it is not easy to take some new play that some crazy, abused writer or theatre has flung at you, and then analyse it for readers so that they will best know how to go about appreciating and enjoying it. It is perhaps not surprising that sometimes critics will go overboard, praising a mediocrity too highly or failing to recognise a masterpiece.

The critic is further hampered by the expectation that if he is going to write usefully about something he should be able to do it himself. Like the omniscient in the baron, he ought to know how it's done, he

ought to have seen it done, but it is unreasonable to expect him to be always doing it himself. It is a sign of some Australian critics' innocence and glibbery and trust that they keep trying.

George Jean Nathan said that a critic's first responsibility was to Dramatic Art, even if it meant closing every theatre in the country. This is the opposite of the critic's real function — which is to keep theatres open by revealing to potential audiences what they can get out of theatre by pointing out value wherever and whenever it may be found. There is a story of a wine connoisseur who asked a glass of sauerkraut, praised famously as good as a great wine of his land, and then pushed the glass away. Asked why he wasn't going to finish it, he said, "I hate sauerkraut." But the recognition of its value came first.

Contemporary Australian Drama does however reveal that Australian critics over the last 25 years have not measured up to the task of explaining and evaluating the work of Australian dramatists. (The book does not concern itself with general theatre criticism.) An anthology of criticism such as this can have one of two functions. It can be a collection of entertaining articles on plays one couldn't care less about (giving the sort of pleasure one gets from Tynan's or Agate's anthologies) or it can stand as a record, from the front line, of significant events of its period. This book is neither. There are too many gaps, too many unexplained phenomena, too many examples of complex writers "summed up" in one or two idiosyncratic articles. Some attempt has been made to commission articles to fill in gaps, but it is half-hearted and misleading (giving an undue weight, for example, to the short-lived Emerald Hill Theatre in Melbourne).

The hard-pressed editor, however, cannot be expected to do everything himself. (Although it is a scandal that Ian Robertson's mindless diatribe against Bazo should be included without Bazo's own piece and at the expense, for example, of Dorothy Hewitt's beautiful review of *Matariki Way*.) The main fault must lie with the critics themselves. This book's introduction admits that Australian critics have left a critical legacy but hardly a critical tradition. "Such a collection as this will have value if it can indicate the need for and development of such a tradition." It is a modest aim for a major critical anthology to illustrate the need for more — and it is accomplished. Bazo has written a few more plays since 1973, Williamson since 1976.

Specifically the book, by anthologizing

articles that seemed important at the time, perpetuates various critical fallacies. The matter of whether the short-lived plays of the '50s do or do not contain enough heightened, Chekhovian human conflict is now generally regarded as a non-issue. Certainly the same argument applied to some writers of the '70s has never been a real issue. Presumably this book will be read by future students of Australian



theatre and the articles in it are thus given some weight of influence. The book attempts to atone for this omission by the memory of Emerald Hill, but it totally ignores many other influential companies (such as Sydney's Jane Street Theatre). In the sections on individual playwrights some very odd, and sometimes rather specialised opinions are expressed. In the absence of a balanced range of criticism, some additional comment is at least needed to guide potential students away from the bizarre and idiosyncratic.

It is still a very useful and interesting book, though, and I'm sorry to leave it till the end to say so, but that is the way of reviewers. It makes available some material otherwise difficult to obtain and it gives an interesting new perspective on the growth of a theatrical climate of opinion. The truth is complex, and beyond the power of any individual to discover, to books such as this are a natural (and democratic) tool in the great search for it.

ACT THEATRE

ANU ARTS CENTRE (49 3728)

Australian National Playwrights Conference To May 10

Fit For A King Director, Paul Thom May 14-16 Australian Theatre Workshop presents *Happi Birthday Wanda Jara* by Kuro Yonemitsu Jan May 21-23, 27-30

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)

AETT presents *Where Life Is A War* by Brian Clark, with Robert Cadeby May 5-9

Six Bad Moons with Jimmy Edwards and Eric Sykes May 11-16 Cladan Cultural Exchange presents *On Herds in Delusion* May 18-20

PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)

Tempe Theatre presents *Half A Sexpensive* based on HG Wells' *Apes* May 11-20

THEATRE 3 (47 4222)

Death Of A Salesman by Arthur Miller May 4-20

OPERA

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)

Canberra Opera presents *Chalkdust Of The Caravelles* by Poulenc, May 1-2

For artists contact Janet Huxley on 49 7648/48 4867.

NSW THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)

Adult Tutors Human Voice Dance Theatre, North and North West begin Jan May 27

BONDI PAVILION THEATRE (38 7211)

The Last of Winter by James Goldsmith, directed by Vincent Bull, Commences May 13

CAPITOL THEATRE (212 9455)

Evie The Stage Spectacular, with Vince Eager, Be With and JJ McKean, Commences May 11

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 6475)

I Ought to Be in Photos by Neil Simon, directed by Hayes Gordon, designed by Shaun Gordon, with Julie Baker, Sharon Hangan, and Brian Young, Throughout May

FRANK STRAITS BULLYBUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (335 9988)

The Good Old Bad Old Days, with Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Loran, directed by George Gordon, Throughout May

GENESIAN THEATRE (33 3648)

Wings in the Wings by Noel Coward, directed by Elizabeth Lyndon, Throughout May

GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY (13 3817)

Supra Theatre, *Armed At Order* by Charles Marowitz, directed by Ian Wilson, Until May 3, New production commences mid May.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3413)

Evie by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, directed by Harold Prince, with Jennifer Murphy, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alamo, Continuing

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY, Newcastle (49 26 3526)

No Names No Park Drive by Bob Herbert, director, Anne Norrie, To May 2

His Fever by Noel Coward, director Anne Norrie, May 3-20

KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415)

Korrobil Hotel, Milton's Point
The Firmest Eve Show by Perry Quanton and Paul Chubb, music by Adrian Morgan, lyrics by PFCramer, directed by Perry Quanton, with Zoe Brennan, Jane Hamilton, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson, Throughout May

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (998 1166)

Outside Edge by Richard Harris, directed by Richard Michalski, with Tim McCarthy, Louise Page, Trevor Kent, Anna-Maria Winchester and David Goddard, Until May 9

Five Newer Cuts To by George Bernard Shaw, directed by Terry Clarke, Commences May 13

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (2058)

Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House
The Magic Pudding by Norman Lindsay, directed by Richard Bradstone, May 11-23

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (937 6583)

Parade Our Prayers directed by Peggy Mortimer, with Ron Fearn, Maggie Sears and Lee Young, Throughout May

NEW THEATRE (519 4803)

Nobly Now by Kevin McGrath, directed

by Marie Armstrong, Until May 9
The Workroom by Jean-Claude Grunberg, directed by John Tarkenton, Commences mid May

NIMBOO THEATRE (999 3003)

Upstairs, Downstairs by Alan MacKay, Presented by the St Martin's Youth Arts Centre, directed by Helmut Bakula, Commences May 13

Downstairs, Room in the Room by Gwen Clarke, directed by Fay Makinson, with Martin Harris, Carolyn Skinner and Heather Mitchell, Until May 17

NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1000)

Therefore, a new production for primary schools and *The Unholy World of Jasper Lawson* for secondary schools, both directed by Ian Watson, with Nicki Celestin, David London, Colin Allen, Bill Eggertson and Reimund Lema, Throughout May

PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (332 6376)

Stanley by Barry Oakley, with Max Gilson, Into May
Dark Whispers directed by Peter Williams, May 21-23

Q THEATRE (947 21 5733)

The Bankster by John Upson, French until May 2

My Carol Po! *My Womb Po!* by Garry Fox, directed by Rick Bingham, French from May 3

REGENT THEATRE (264 7981)

At Long Last commences with Barry Humphries, Until May 23

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (969 25 3033)

Paul by Pam Gems, May 15 to 30

STUDIO SYDNEY (264 7988, 358 6896)

Wayide Chapel
Sandwich Last Summer and *The Lady of Larkspur Lodges* by Tennessee Williams, directed by Rob Finner, with Linda Blake, Heather Christie, Christopher Parr and Lisa Parris, Design by Yorks Toss, Commences May 9

THE ROCKS PLAYERS (949 0320)

Play with a Tiger by Gail Loring, directed by Amanda Field, Until mid May

SEYMOUR CENTRE (493 0555)

York Theatre Festival Reported by David Mason-Cox, Kevin Scant and Max Hifford, directed by Max Hifford, A Q Theatre production, Commences May 15

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)

Touring metropolitan and country areas with *The Tale Play* directed by Don Moore and *The Third World Horror Show* directed by Michael Webb

Youth Theatre Showcase, Also presented by The Marnett Theatre of Australia, May 1 and 2

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

(26588)

Opera Theatre, SOH

Hamlet by William Shakespeare, directed by William Gaskell, with Kate Fitzpatrick, John Gaden, Alexander Hay, Nore Harkness, George Spentis and Colin Fries Until May 9

THEATRE ROYAL (231411)

Ample Theatre in Epitaphs May 1 to 9. *De Hilde in Dehousen* May 12 to 16. *The Doctor* by Ronald Harwood, with Warren Mitchell, Gordon Chase and Ruth Clarken. Commences May 22

DANCE

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

(20088)

Opera Theatre, SOH

Pavane by Concertina by Chao San Goh. *Form* by Robert Ray and *Moments* by Frederick Ashton. May 6-26

For entries contact Carol Long on 237 2266/2683310

QLD

THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (362346)

Threat by Christopher Hampton, director. *Brave Part*, with Michael McCallum and Jennifer Flowers. May 7-June 13

CAMERATA THEATRE (371734)

The Cement Box, Anywhere director, Ron Tweedale. To May 9

HER MAJESTY'S (321277)

Elvis. To May 9

My Bad Measure with Eric Sykes and Jeremy Edwards. May 19-26

LA ROUTE THEATRE (361822)

Chrysothorax by Trevor Gaffney, director. Jeremy Ridgman, designer. Andrew Weir. To May 16

POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE

(361742)

Ring theatre for current programmes.

MUMMERS THEATRE TROUPE

(2653871)

The Cement Box: A Jovian Festival director, Rolyan Royleane. May 18-26

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

COMPANY (221361)

SOHO: The Circle by W Somerset Maugham, director, Alan Edwards, designer. Graham Maclean. May 8-23

IN COMPANY (3525133)

Brooklyn Street, *Shingle Fringe* director, Bryan Mason, devised by the group. May 20-June 6

DANCE

QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY

(229335)

SOHO: The Ice Maiden, Nights In A Sonnet director, To May 2. On tour May 4-June 13

For entries contact Jeremy Ridgman on 377 2266/2683495

SA

THEATRE

ACTING COMPANY (267511)

**Schools: I Wanted to Draw The Mind The Order Day*, May 11-15

ELDER PARK (31821)

**SBSA Test*, Gillian Farrelly. May 11-23

Kodi Cabaret with Pops Storm. May 11-22

**Schools: How Do You Feel* with Gillian Farrelly. May 11-23

Enter You Morn or You Don't with Pops Storm. May 11-15

Caribbean and Danish: Half with Pops Storm. May 11-22

The Story Of Whosque with Brian Joyce. May 11-15

FESTIVAL THEATRE

Space Theatre. SACW and YOP presents *Crops, and Flowers For Algebra*. May 1-2

LITTLE PATCH THEATRE (24328)

**Tarlton Storm, Simon Park: My Cook-a-book's Sound Recipe*. May 11-23

PAPERBAG THEATRE COMPANY (323563)

**Q Theatre: The Seven Fears*. May 18-23

Q THEATRE (223563)

89 Halden St. Assassins by Marcelle Maestre director. Bill O'Day. May 8-June 6

SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (31821)

**Schools: Taking Shape, I've Got A Name, Love, Revenge*. May 18-19

STATE THEATRE COMPANY

(31351)

Playhouse: Pigmahon by George Bernard Shaw, director, Kevin Palmer. May 1-23

**Maggie TIE Team: Golden Fables* by Connelly Hewitt. May 8-23

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE OF THE DEAF

Elgin Park. *The Colour Show*. May 16, 17, 23

TROIKA TIE TEAM (262830)

**West Torrens Public Library Audiatorium: All Of Us Moves*. May 11-22

TROUPE (231763)

Unity Town Hall. *Feck Gallery Theatre Company presents Sleeping Beauty*. May 21-June 6

VICTORIAN THEATRE OF THE DEAF

**Schools: Now Listen Ear*. May 14-17

DANCE

CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS (312418)

**ST Centre St. Adelaide CPE and CPA presents: Perfection Dance*. May 14

SPACE THEATRE (31812)

**Adelaide Festival Centre: Murray's Little Curly and the Australian Dance Theatre presents: Eggs, choreographer, Anne Taylor*. May 12-23

OPERA

STATE OPERA (31616)

**Opera Theatre: All The Kings Men* director, Brian Gehman

For entries contact Edwin Bell on 2675983

* An event in the Comical Youth Arts Festival.

TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY

(343818)

In rehearsal: Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas

SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (233259)

On Tour: Taking Shape, I've Got A Name

North-East Tasmania. May 1-7. Commence Festival in Adelaide May 8-23. In Hobart May 23-28

THEATRE ROYAL (244286)

University Revue Company. May 8-23

For entries contact Lucie Wignar on 327 26118

From page 3

"best" scripts would seem to lean very much in favour of the experienced.

To offer a balanced service to our now established theatre, a National Playwrights' Conference must continue to introduce new blood into the system and foster the development of mature talent that is currently in circulation. Change and movement is the life force of any art form, but consolidation and maturity is the structure on which it rests. One of the greatest assets the Canberra fortnight has to offer to young writers is exchange and discussion with experienced playwrights. Both levels may gain greater insight by sharing the workshoping process.

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Across:

1. Football one to bury the laws that were never started (10)
8. Doesn't apply to the little girl in Pige (9)
10. He mounts a framework of alloy around the tea shop (10)
11. Example out point of land (4)
13. It's miserable, but it could be ten you own us (7)
15. Straight long is around, at home (6)
16. Chat about our costume (8)
17. Observed tumbler Alice gets through (3, 7, 5)
18. Smoking jacket? (8)
20. Second rate haystacks used in walls (6)
21. Canoe teacher education is troubled Leeds (7)
23. Picture purchased with the odd coin (4)
25. Time to recognise Horn and Log Coy (10)
26. Bird peas rolling about in church (6)
27. What to do to milk from poor field is to be neutral (10)

Down:

2. Points to a model home (4)
3. Text a first person statement of previous existence (4)
4. The German about *any* very loud — can be distinguished from... (6)
5. ...dashing but two dimensional playboys? (9,4)
6. Put the pressure on a higher echelon (4, 2)
7. Cut hair, upsets (10)
9. Manifestation a very soft linear can perhaps point to (10)
12. Uncommon international information for Cupid about class (10)
13. Nois and Ted's union ended in clawing (7)
14. Have two characters in *The Chive* (7)
19. Strange! His rap is again put on a boat (6)
20. Describe hotel suit is found in (6)
22. Character leaves vocal group to gain filter (4)
24. Candy, especially popcorn, contains artificial coloring (4)



Last month's winner is Mrs. Carol Stannard of Glenora, NSW. The first correct entry drawn on May 25 will receive one year's free subscription to *TA*.

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Designed by William Pritchard

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WA THEATRE

HOLE IN THE WALL (381 2403)

Studios by James Saunders, director.
Stephen Barry To May 21
PLAYHOUSE (325 3500)

More Than A Sentimental Stroke by C.J. Dennis, with John Duran May 6-16

Touring company centres May 18-June 6
The Elephant Man by Bernard Pomerance, director, Stephen Barry, with Robert Van Mackelenberg May 21-June 13

OCTOCON THEATRE (380 3440)

Mason Miller presents *The Importance Of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde To May 23

ST GEORGE'S HALL (325 5500)

Perth Actors' Company *Ring Around The Moon* by Anouilh, director, Ken Campbell-Dorset To May 9
Banquet For One by Gombert, director, Hal Davies May 23-June 6

OPERA

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE

(321 6288)
WA Opera Company *John Of Hoffman* by Offenbach, director, Gerald King, producer, Edgar Metcalfe, designer, William Dowd, with Christa Leishman, John Mann, Anne Watson, Megan Sarson, Colin Goddard, Martin Clark, Chris Waddell, Ron Harwood, James Malcolm and Nicole Wilkie May 11-20
For further contact Margaret Schwan on 341 1178.

VIC THEATRE

ALEXANDER THEATRE (540 3030)

Naughty Comes To Town May 11-23
Saver Time Next Year director, Don McKay

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 1135)

Steel City Striker by Jay Weidenstam, director, Denis Moore, designer, Peter King and Michael Anderson
ARENA THEATRE (249 667)

Drama Workshops

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

(529 4355)
Ringwood Cultural Centre: *Old Alms-house* director, Roger Clissold, dramatised by Alfred Thompson. From the book by Reginald Arkell To May 9

BANANA LOUNGE (419 2868)

Humour And Smoother Blues Throughout May
COMEDY CAFE THEATRE
RESTAURANT (419 2868)

Original entertainment throughout May
DRAMA RESOURCE CENTRE

(222 3186)
Workshops at Victorian Youth Drama Camp
FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (413 717)

Tek-Tek-Tek
LA MAMA (347 6085)
The Name by Michael McGinnis

Seven At Room Temperature by Suzanne Toner and Landscape by Harold Pinter May 6-10
Arch Dickinson Abroad by Meredith Rogers, based on letters and poems by Emily Dickinson May 13-24

Nebraska *Macbeth* *Archer* by Anthony Thornegood, director, Ian Nash May 23-June 7

LAST LAUGH THEATRE

RESTAURANT (419 6235)
Mark Connors *All Stars Review* director, Tony O'Connell Throughout May Late Shows upstairs changing weekly

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)
Athenagoras Theatre: *Joe McGuffin And The Grammar* by Keith Michell, director, John Sumner, designer, Anne Fries To May 11

Russell Street Theatre *Enigma* by Ron Elsha, director, Bruce Myles, designer, Richard Price To June 6
Athenagoras 2: Archon by Carol Beahm and Ned Sherrin, director, Ron Rodger, designer, Christopher Smith To June 27

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (222 3186)
Don Quixote devised and written by the company May 11-22 Community Access Workshops

Mill Nights Run Of The Mill Tonnage Workshops
MUSHROOM TROUPE

MOUNTBANK (376 1364)
Touring Schools *Flying Rivers* devised by the company
Ar by Alison Richards, Performants Universal Theatre May 11-23

MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (217 6635)
Border Shopping Town North *The Clown Show* and *The Criminal Don Diego* May 11-16

PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (654 8855)
Downstairs Australian premiere *I Saw A Letter To My Love* by Benno Robson, director, Malcolm Robertson, designer,

John Beckoff, with Gerda Nielsen, Caroline Gilman, Robin Canning May 24
Upstairs *Strolling Summer* by Donna Clarke, director, Ron Horne, designer, Tanya Wain To May 5

Donor Of Death by August Strindberg, director, Roger Palmer, designer, Peter Corrigan, with Maggie Miller and Gary Pike May 21-June

THEATRE WORKS (283 0444)
The Go Ahead *Where Shave* by the company
UNIVERSAL THEATRE (419 3777)

The One Extra Dance Theatre presents, *Parasol* *Spencer* by Michael Matou, with Graeme Watson and Kim Tai Chan To May 3
A Parade To No Man's Land To May 6

Maribron Troupe presents *Ar* by Alison Richards May 11-23
WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE (320 7034)

Teasing Just A Simple Stroke by Phil Sattman, director, Phil Thomson and Jan McDonald
The Movers directed and devised by Ray Mooney

The Clown Troupe Throughout May
Wor On Wednesday Theatre Workshops

Excursion Care Theatre *West Night Out*
Yamat Theatre *Tadpole Theatre*
AMATEUR THEATRE GROUPS

Bane Theatre Group 783 1083
Clayton Theatre Group 838 1702
Hendberg Rep 493262

Melbore Theatre Company 428237
1812 Theatre 783 3964
Purphur Theatre 428 6237

DANCE

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (653 1010)

Cluden Dance Cultural Exchange May 16-20

OPERA

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

(529 4355)
Touring *La Traviata* by the Victorian State Opera, conductor, Richard Davall, Andrew Grove and Graham Cox, director, John Milson

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 7911)
The Barber of Seville by Rossini, with the Australian Opera May 14, 16, 21
Kareu Kobomoro by Janacki May 2 & 5, 15, 16

The Argonaut Opera by John Ley May 22, 23, 27, 30
For further contact Corrie Kramer on 88 9446